# THE saint DETECTIVE MAGAZINE

MAY
35c

*Edited by LESLIE CHARTERIS*

It's Against the Law
*by ERSKINE CALDWELL*

The Disappearing Investors
*by EDGAR WALLACE*

The Murderer's Ring
*by WILLIAM MacHARG*

The Woman on the Terrace
*by MELVILLE DAVISSON POST*

That's Arson, Parson
*by LESLIE CHARTERIS*

## LET HER KILL HERSELF

*A NEW SHORT NOVEL by RUFUS KING*

SOME OLD, SOME NEW — THE FINEST IN MYSTERY FICTION

A KING-SIZE PUBLICATION

FOR THE SECOND TIME—and in only seven months, too—we are proud to turn over the Royal Box to one of the royal family of mystery writers, Rufus King, who rejoins us with a brand new short novel, LET HER KILL HERSELF. Again the setting is the southeast Florida coast for which the King and I share a long-standing affection, with all kinds of sinister business up to and including murder going on around a luxury motel. This may not be exactly the kind of material the Chamber of Commerce sends out to prospective tourists, but we guarantee it to grip and entertain any traveler—and we honestly hope it won't keep anyone away.

Best sellers come and best sellers go, holding the top of the heap for a season and being elbowed off by someone new; but with all the fanfares which accompany that competition it is easy to overlook the fact that one of the consistently biggest sellers in the whole world is a quiet fellow named Erskine Caldwell, who at last reports claimed to have sold an astronomical 35,000,000 books. But much as we ourselves have loved his remorseless studies of the Tobacco Road country, with their rich earthy humor and dialog that sculptures characters like a scalpel, we never thought we could fit him into this magazine—until we came upon IT'S AGAINST THE LAW.

Another first-timer with us this month is Melville Davisson Post—although directly we start to crow about it we find ourselves uneasily hoping that nobody will ask why we waited so long. Certainly his stories of Monsieur Jonquelle, of the French Sûreté, have been enjoyed by all informed aficionados, and we really have no excuse for not bringing you a sample like WOMAN ON THE TERRACE many volumes before this.

Turning back to our old favorites, we have the immortal Edgar Wallace's immortal J. G. Reeder applying his deceptively prim attention to THE DISAPPEARING INVESTORS, which leads to homicide on a commercial scale, while William MacHarg's more rough-hewn Dan O'Malley tackles the more individual puzzle of the victim of a one-way ride in THE MURDERER'S RING.

After the true-crime experiment which I tried on you last year—incidentally, in the same issue in which Rufus King made his debut with us—we had so much interested comment that we have been emboldened to offer you another, and this seems to be a good cue for it. So my own contribution this month is THAT'S ARSON, PARSON, and deals with a man who had nothing in common with any Saint, at all.

Leslie Charteris

# We're Looking For People Who Like To Draw!

*by Albert Dorne*

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*The* ROSICRUCIANS (AMORC)
SAN JOSE CALIFORNIA

# let her kill herself

*by . . . Rufus King*

**Murder on the Florida Gold Coast may come in a variety of chill patterns. But Justice has sharp edges to match!**

## I

THE MOTEL, hugging the shore of the lazy sea, was called Black's. Located on the Gold Coast between Miami Beach and Ft. Lauderdale it offered in its single-storied fashion luxurious living at a good stiff price, specially now in February which was the height of the season.

There were the customary swimming pool, arranged like a kidney bean, a private beach, a cocktail room that was totally atmospheric and, if you were silly enough to patronize it, a small restaurant that served luncheon snacks.

On the beach proper, artistically conceived as a thatched job from Pago-Pago, was the combined living quarters and beach wear shop of the lifeguard, Oscar Bjorgsen. He lived there, not with a wife, as yet, but with Jimmy Hart, the night shift bartender of the cocktail lounge. They also shared a sporty convertible and their melting point towards

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*With this startlingly realistic, brand new crime novel, the author of* MURDER IN MIAMI *and* CRIME OF VIOLENCE *emerges as one of the most accomplished illuminators of the darker regions of human experience in contemporary mystery fiction. There's a Freudian undertow here which will thrill and astound you, a swiftly mounting terror that culminates in a smash climax unforgettable in its implications. One can be sure that such tension and such suspense could only be generated by a master storyteller writing at the top of his bent.*

---

dames could be reached with the glow from a match.

As Jimmy often remarked during the next six months, at which time a fresher conversation piece developed in the form of a poisoned divorcee from Newark, nothing could have been smoother than Thursday night. The regulars were all in their regular places and he noted, while stirring two manhattans for the Cardigan bags, the last element of what he called the Dean-Lang-Situation coming into the lounge.

She was registered as Miss Theda Sangford and the briefest glance stamped her as a woman of mystery, her looks being darkly exotic and her costumes as revealing as a crystal ball. Naturally, she slinked, her insurable legs and contest-winner torso giving all of her movements the liquid coordination of quicksilver. You were prepared for about any sort of a contralto foreign accent and were consequently rocked when her voice turned out to be solid Bronx as chirped by a bird.

The bar closed at two, and just before the hour Miss Sangford said to Jimmy: "Drop off a bottle on your way by, will you, Jimmy?"

"The usual?"

"Yes. Maybe you'd better make it two."

"Glad to, Miss Sangford. In about half an hour?"

"That'll be fine."

Jimmy put the bar to bed, and Eric Havermay, who had the bar concession, took the night's receipts and they drank a brew together.

"I've got a feeling," Havermay said, "I've got a feeling that something's coming up and I don't like it. It's a bad situation."

"Young Dean?" Jimmy asked.

"Both him and his mother—and Spang and Sangford."

"Setups like that are a dime a dozen down here, and you know it."

"I do and I know what comes of them. Trouble—sometimes in big red letters. Who's the bottles for?"

"Sangford. She wants me to drop them on the way by."

"She's swimming in it right now."

"Well?"

"Well, just this. It's what I've been talking about. It's exactly when it happens. Let them put away enough of that stuff and we're in court as homicide witnesses. Not one time when it's ever happened down here have they been sober."

Jimmy said again: "Well?"

Havermay wrestled with a few sparse, sterling shreds of an early New England conscience, one that had been a shining field, sumptuous with a crop of basic virtues and tailormade niceties. But a man had to live. And he had to get it while the getting was good. For a buck could stretch a little because a buck was

a buck. He didn't like to do this stretching and would often say so in the didactic tones of a moralist. But he did it nevertheless. She was a good customer—good for twenty bucks a night.

"All right," he said. "Let her knock herself out then. Let her kill herself if she wants to."

Havermay left. The stock was padlocked and the lights extinguished, with the exception of one torchere on a driftwood stand near the door. Jimmy killed a palmetto bug—Florida for flying cockroach—stepping on its paper-thin armorplate and kicking it under the duckwalk.

The bar was in order, the ashtrays clean and rightly spaced along its length, the glasses cleanly clear, and in the shadows of the night-filled room a white hand moved. Its pale arc hovered over near the table where young Dean always sat with his "watchdog" Bert Jackson, and Alice Spang, and Jimmy went over to the woman who was seated there.

"It's closing time, Miss Fernandez," he said.

She was an attractive woman in a heavy way, dark-eyed and dark-haired and dressed on the ornamental side, with a bank of expensive bracelets on her left forearm, and with large earrings of intricate gold.

"Yes," she said, "I know. I am depressed. There is a mist, very black. Not for me, you understand, but for others. For that alive young man and the girl he should marry. I grope after their future, but my fingers touch nothing."

Jimmy summed up his knowledge of her. Rich, very possibly a Porto Rican of unusually distinguished ancestry, a good but never excessive tipper, a conservative drinker—neither a man snatcher nor a table hopper. With a strong hobby, as his lifeguard roommate had told him, for collecting shells along the tide edge. Her odd way of expressing herself was, at worst, a minor quirk. But this "mist" business verged on the screwball. What Jimmy had failed to realize was that Miss Fernandez was also an observant woman in her own strange way and to an all but mathematical degree.

"I stay here," she went on. "And I think. You do not mind?"

"Not a bit."

"You are kind. Good night."

"Good night."

There was no moon and the coral walk past the unit patios was silver against velvet grays and the surface of the swimming pool was silver, and amber light diffused through the Sangford unit's Venetian blinds.

Hart pressed the door button and heard the soft chime and her voice in its birdlike chirp call: "Come in."

He entered an empty living room and her voice called again from behind a closed door:

"Jimmy? Just leave the bottles, will you?"

"On the desk, Miss Sangford."

He placed the bottles on the desk and then under a swift compulsion which he could not at the moment nor at any later time understand called: "Miss Sangford?"

"What, Jimmy?"

"Have you been bothered by any—well, what you might call premonitions? Like, say, groping around in a mist?"

"Not me, Jimmy boy. Tonight the world is my oyster. Forget the creeps, pal, and go home and sleep it off."

Jimmy went, a lithe shade through the stillness of the semi-tropical night and the memory of her laughter did not reassure him, for the feeling that Havermay had felt was dominant, and the crack about mists by Miss Fernandez and the look of seeing in her eyes.

## II

THE NIGHT rolled on with the homecoming of the late ones from the clubs and dancing casinos. Young Ernest Dean and Alice Spang, and Ernest's watch-hound Bert Jackson, came back from dancing in the Coral Room of the Chalefont Towers and a familiar look passed between Ernest and Bert. It was from habit entirely understandable by each and a cartoonist would have symbolized it with pupils in the shape of dollar marks.

Bert Jackson's exact position in the Dean menage was the subject of considerable conjecture among the cocktail brigade. In appearance Bert resembled a somewhat ripening dead-end kid with the build of a wrestler and a rarely-produced infectious smile that would break through the dark glower. He wore expensive clothes and his manners were honed to an edge that would have brought a fan-flick of approval from Emily Post.

He had a fetish for cleanliness, going to indescribable lengths of care and detail about the scrubbed freshness of his person, and somewhere in the dimming past lay a background of both money and gentility.

The women section of the regulars considered this role of Little-Shepherd-to-sonny-boy as just so much eye-wash, even though Ernest's pockets were commonly known to be loaded with his mother's money and an occasional break either at the track or in one of the sub-rosa gaming traps further increased his supply of funds.

No, the gossipers decided that Bert's real job lay in having an affair with Mama Dean. This struck them as being both piquant and wholly just, Mrs. Dean being a widow and quite able to stack up with the best of them. With

her slim, well-kept figure, and shoulder-length hair brushed under and tinted a pale gold it was a commonplace for her to be mistaken as Ernest's sister, especially as his manner held a touch of grave maturity at odd variance with his actual age.

Bert sheered off into the Dean apartment, and Ernest went with Alice into the adjoining Spang patio. They sat on a bamboo chaise lounge and in the darkness under the pinpoint individuality of the stars they were very close and in each other's arms. Their voices were quiet, very low. But they were not low enough to be muted in the hush which was complete but for the slumbrous break of surf along the shore.

Ernest held her more tightly with the warmth of her cheek like fire against his because the pain of his wanting was a terrible thing.

"I guess you know why I drink," he said. "At the tough times, I mean. I get so drunk I don't remember the next day what I've done, and what I've said. Everything's an absolute blank."

"Bert's paid to stop you from that, isn't he?"

"Yes, and to hand in the field reports to mother. Well, he's paid to forget about it too. *By me.* I tell her I've lost at the horses or dice, and then I'll hand it over to him to cover up for me." He added with the acid intensity of youth, in a swelter of self disgust that gagged him like bitter gall: "I'm no good. Really, Alice, I mean it. I'm not honest with anybody. Even with you. She's the most wonderful mother in the world. She's done everything for me, made every sacrifice—"

With a wisdom beyond her nineteen years Alice kept her counsel. Actually she regarded Mrs. Dean as the blood-kin of those cannibal fish who devour their own young.

But she did say: "She'll never let you marry. Ernest, she'll never give you up."

"I know, and there are times when I hate her. I've never said this to a living soul before, Alice. But sometimes I've wished her dead."

"You can't help that, Jimmy. It's the chained feeling. It's that way with me. I go crazy at times and want to rebel when mama shoves me on some rich old wreck. Then her heart—"

Ernest nodded. "I know. Mother's too."

One thing that Mrs. Dean and Mrs. Spang had strongly in common was their hearts. Each had a convenient "condition" as one of the leash effects that could be brought into play at will, Mrs. Dean succumbing to dizziness followed by a faint, and Mrs. Spang being adroit at a frightening spell of last-minute gasps. Both women kept on hand ap-

propriate props to bolster the illusion. Mrs. Spang was never without her ampules of amyl nitrate, and Mrs. Dean had ever within her reach a vial of strychnine pills.

Ernest belted himself still further. "I'm not even a man. But I will be, Alice—now that I've got you. I'll clear up one mess I'm in that you don't even know about, that I never want you to know about. I'm clearing it up in the morning for good."

A low whistle came from the Dean apartment, signalling that Mrs. Dean was awake.

"That's Bert."

They hurriedly, but still moltenly, kissed goodnight and Ernest left.

## III

THE WATER was warm and infinitely soothing to Miss Sangford's admirable body, in particular to her head which was entertaining a convention of riveters. It was also entertaining a few doubts. She felt uncertain that her course was the right one. It had been simple enough to trace him. A note in one of the cafe society gossip columns had taken care of that. But this anger, this decision to smash, to rip things wide simply for the balm of a revenge which would surely prove costly—was that smart?

She closed her eyes and in the comforting water was in a world alone, and with this sense of aloneness a familiar fear stole over her. Suddenly the sense of solitude was gone but the fear remained, increasing a thousand times. She screamed as the hands closed about her ankles.

The familiar hands.

The water, as the grip tightened and gave a yank, choked short her scream.

It was many hours later when dawn paled the east while bands of pistache and cerise roped low above the horizon of the sea, and Miss Fernandez, brilliant in a flamingo swim suit, walked down to the tide edge for a dip and to gather shells.

Actually it was an almost impossible hour for the search as the air and sea and sand were bathed in a pale luminosity rather than true light. But it was a physical action, like fingering beads, one which kept her body occupied while her real concentration lay in her thoughts.

A movement off to her left in the Dean's corner unit of the motel caught her attention. It registered itself as the somewhat careful closing of the apartment's beach door. It was being pulled gently to from the inside. And then almost at once within the perimeter visible to her shell-seeking eyes, appearing over its circumference as she moved forward, was the body of a woman, and shock confused her while the knowledge slowly registered that

it was Miss Sangford and that Miss Sangford was dead.

Miss Fernandez's notion of corpse-discovery procedure in the United States was exclusively based on Spanish translations of paperbacks from which she had gleaned the inflexible rule that never must anything be touched on the spot until the police arrive. Also, apart from being ignorant as to how to go about doing it, she did not consider using artificial respiration. Having passed through numerous Puerto Rican political revolutions she considered herself expert at recognizing permanent death when she saw it.

Speed in informing the proper authorities was important. She fished a coin purse from her bag of shells and going to a telephone booth attached to the lifeguard's shop dialed the operator and asked to be connected with the police.

"An emergency?" the operator asked.

"Very. A woman. She has been drowned."

"I will connect you directly with Chief Duggan's home. The men at the station will be out on patrol."

Bill Duggan, in his thirties, was steeped in the leisureliness of Florida living but in spite of a retarded outlook on the illegal antics of his fellow men he was thoroughly up to date on most new phases of criminology. The drowned were no novelty for him. Before joining the force he had been a lifeguard and his knowledge of crazy bathers, sane fish and wholesome, sticky, tangy salt water was encyclopaedic.

When he reached Black's private beach, accompanied by the handsome hulk of Officer Alan Day, he found Miss Fernandez standing in guardian vigil beside the body.

She spoke in a composed tone. "One thought at first, for the briefest moment, that she slept. But no. As the gentlemen can observe, she is dead."

Duggan observed. The body, clothed in the scantiest of swim suits, lay on one side close to the surf. There was no bathing cap and dark strands of hair partially masked a profile which by its suggestion of tautness indicated that rigidity had begun. Duggan knelt, and confirmed immediately that rigor mortis already was attacking the face and jaw.

"Will I get to work?" Day asked.

Duggan shook his head. "No use, Al. It's too late. Call up and cancel the pulmotor and tell Roth we'll want pictures. Also ask Tropical to send an ambulance."

Duggan studied the sand pattern dried on the flesh. He brushed back the clinging hair the better to see the features. His fingers paused, then cautiously explored the scalp. There was a degree of dampness at the hair

base which the high humidity of the atmosphere had kept from drying out, even though to judge from the onset of rigor death had occurred at least two hours previously.

He leaned quite closely to the hair and sniffed. He found some bruise marks which interested him around the ankles. He took a notebook from his pocket, and turned back to Miss Fernandez.

"May I have your full name, please?" he asked.

"Loreta Janeta Fernandez."

"You are a guest here, Miss Fernandez?"

"For one week and for one week more. Then I am home again in San Juan."

"Do you know who this is?"

"She too is a guest. A Miss Theda Sangford from the city of New York. Beyond that I am ignorant but for an incident of uncertain value. I hesitate to speak up. He is a good, a nice young man but badly controlled by his mother. You have the expression—a mama's boy?"

"Yes?"

"It would be distasteful to me to believe he would permit this poor one to drown. You understand?"

"Perfectly." Duggan smiled faintly. "Who is he, and why do you think he may have?"

"He is Ernest Dean. He is a youth very stalwart in the extreme but with blood that turns to milk beneath his mother's touch." Miss Fernandez pointed, emphasizing the gesture with a deepening earnestness of expression. "I behold the movement of that door. It is being pulled shut from within. This will be but a minute ago at the hour when nobody is abroad. You will weigh the event of this door judicially? With compassion? You will consider his youth and that in all virtue he may have tried to save her? In vain. And then in panic, upon observing my approach, he fled?"

It was c u r i o u s, Duggan thought, how patly a layman could tie up a homicide and present it with an absurd assurance to a trained observer.

"Evidently you know of some connection between this woman and Mr. Dean?" he said.

Miss Fernandez looked somberly wise. She struggled to encapsule within a few words a panorama of a situation which had, for a considerable time now, been disturbing her inwardly.

"It is deeper than the shopworn convention one calls the eternal triangle. Its roots lie in the character of that dangerous woman."

Duggan stared at her levelly.

"This woman? Miss Sangford?"

She expressed a shrug of impatience at his ineptitude in failing to grasp instantly the implacable chains that fettered young Dean.

"No, no, in his mother. She is rich, but fantastically rich. Her jewels alone are worth a fortune. She has put the world at his feet, but he dare not explore it without her visa."

"What I suppose you are getting at, Miss Fernandez, is that Miss Sangford made a serious attempt to snag the boy."

"What else? Not alone I but all of the guests knew it to be true. I was in the cocktail lounge on the evening when this greedy one arrived. How shall I tell you?"

She looked at him, and beyond him, and back to the scene of Theda Sangford's initial entrance one week before into the cocktail lounge, adjusting the main characters—young Dean and Bert—in their proper place on stage, which was a table beneath a mounted marlin on the west wall. She pictured herself seated near enough for observation, but quite beyond earshot of what was being said. Then she brought the body of Theda Sangford from its stiffening posture on the sand into an effect of life that was convincing despite her outlandish way of expressing herself.

"One watched her entrance which was in the manner where every step is a provocation. One watched her pause, and survey the field. One watched her remove a cigarette from a jeweled case and seat herself on a banquette adjoining the table of Mr. Dean. It was a display of virtuosity which would have brought an acclaim to a Cleopatra. Almost immediately she asked him for a light. Ah—and the impact!"

"On Dean?"

"I shall tell you this. You may regard it as equivalent to the effect upon a man which would be produced by a cobra with business in its eye."

"Well after all," Duggan said equably, "if there was an initial aversion on his part—I'm afraid I just don't understand."

She said with courteous impatience that he did not understand his own sex—nor did he evidently comprehend the power of sex in itself, particularly when it was wielded by an accomplished woman. This, of course, was absolute slander but Duggan let it pass.

"You will accept that by last night she had him in her power." Miss Fernandez launched into the full-bodied stream of her narrative. "You will regard me at the hour of cocktails seated at a vantage point from which one aspect of this tragedy could be observed very clearly."

"Just let me get this straight. You're talking now about last night?"

"I am. To my right, at their accustomed table beneath that stiff, stuffed fish are seated Mr. Dean and the leechlike Mr. Jackson."

"Why leechlike?"

"He is the agent engaged by Mrs. Dean to report every movement of her son. So they sit there and they solace themselves with double daquiris while awaiting the arrival of Miss Spang."

"Double daquiris. I see. How was young Dean? Would you say that he was drunk?"

"He had taken too much to drink. But it is not Miss Spang who accepts the waiting chair. It is this poor one, here." Fernandez lowered a glance of Christian commiseration on the dead. "I must tell you that Mr. Jackson is temporarily gone through that door on which is the silhouette of a running man.

"For the instant I am bemused by Francine, the barmaid, who is producing at my table a rum punch. When again I study Mr. Dean it is to see his face is as white as the under portion of that terrible fish. He is saying, forgetting his true gentility: 'Shut up!' And this unfortunate one employs upon her lips a smile of pure evil and remarks: 'By daybreak, understand? Be there or you will be a very, very sorry little boy'." Miss Fernandez concluded simply: "She stands. She goes. It is the curtain of her scene."

It also, Duggan realized, planted Dean squarely on the spot.

"You said one aspect, Miss Fernandez. Were there others?"

The sun, with leisure, rose above the ocean's rim. The sands were fired with gold and only the flesh of Miss Sangford retained a mortal pallor. The tide on ebb sighed backwards into the sea, and Miss Fernandez emerged with another small bouquet from the dark garden of her thoughts.

"After dinner, at the hour when the television is in force, seated on the banquette next to mine are Mrs. Dean and Mrs. Spang. Ah, that one!"

Duggan asked with reasonable uncertainty: "Which?"

"Mrs. Spang, the mother of that charming, fragrant girl. A woman, you must grasp, of ice with a cold prettiness that is beginning to melt with age. As one woman has put it to me, she is a Custer in Schiaparelli embarked on her ultimate stand."

"Busted?"

"So it is said. It is either a marriage of importance or the end. The Dean fortune exposes itself as her last gun."

"Well, from what you've told me he seems willing enough. Or was Miss Sangford a serious threat?"

"You will consider the conversation which I overheard during a moment when the scenario on the television screen concerns itself with pantomime. You will listen, please, to Mrs. Dean: 'If Ernest were to marry and leave me I would cut his allowance off completely.' To this decision Mrs. Spang replies: 'I suppose you

know best, dear. But that woman is determined. Why don't you go to Nassau until she leaves?' And now, the crux. It is the voice of Mrs. Dean: 'I shall meet this danger in my own manner and *never by running away*'."

Miss Fernandez reached the end of her disclosures and obviously waited for Duggan to take up the ball. What she expected, he imagined, was a swift descent on his part upon young Dean, who being a fine, upstanding American youth—no matter how badly mother-ridden — would obligingly admit that he had met Miss Sangford by appointment at daybreak. Under the harmless cloak of taking an early morning dip, of course. It would then be revealed that the dip had backfired and that young Dean, callowly panic stricken, had taken off for home base.

## IV

DUGGAN WAS SAVED from disillusioning Miss Fernandez as to the number of holes in this amateur's slice of Swiss by a group strolling towards them from the motel. It was led by Officer Day. Duggan explained to Roth, a police technician, what pictures to take—specifying in particular closeups of the ankles and the hair, and the patterns left on the dead woman's flesh by the dried sand. He suggested that they first be outlined, say with a lipstick.

He wanted a complete set of Miss Sangford's fingerprints and to have them transmitted telephotographically immediately to New York and Washington, after which the boys could remove the body to the morgue space of Tropical to be held for the medical examiner.

He left a final suggestion that a detailed search be made of the shoreline to the north and south. If the ocean had been kind enough to disgorge it, he would also like the bathing cap which was missing from Miss Sangford's head. Presumably it had been lost during the usual convulsive struggles that precede a death by drowning. Then he went to the manager's apartment and called up Sibley.

Dr. Frank Sibley, pathologist at Tropical General Hospital, was the appointed associate medical examiner for South Broward county. He was young, he was a perfectionist, and he was adroit. Homicide held for him the peculiar fascination of a Chinese puzzle, one of the ring sort which requires the most delicate patience and care to solve.

Duggan explained.

He said to Sibley in conclusion: "One thing I wish you'd do at once, Frank. Subject the heart to the Gettler test."

Sibley was impressed.

"So it's one of those?"

"I think it is. Let me know, will you, as soon as you've

checked? As early this afternoon as possible?"

"Look, Bill, the solutions for that test have to stand overnight. There will be nothing on it decisive before tomorrow morning."

Waldo Barcombe, the motel manager, came into the room from his quarters and looked frowsily at Duggan. Waldo's job was largely titular as his wife Kitty did the managing and the actual work of keeping the place running smoothly. In spite of his post before the public Waldo was not in reality an affable man, being given to blanket dislikes such as loathing all southerners, all jobs where the slightest physical activity was required, and any lack of tastiness in the preparation by Kitty of his meals. He was an all round coddled egg.

"Hello Bill," he said. "Kitty's told me. There's always one like that Miss Sangford. A trouble maker."

"Tell me about her."

"What do we know about any of them? What they tell us, that's all. She had the dough and she laid it on the line."

"For how long?"

"Two weeks."

"What else?"

"A New York address in the east Fifties."

"How about mail since she's been here?"

"No mail."

"Phone calls?"

Waldo picked up the telephone and said to the girl on the front office switchboard: "About Miss Sangford, Mabel—"

"Isn't it terrible!"

"No, it isn't. She probably took a swim while potted and got what was coming to her."

"Oh Mr. Barcombe! The Bible says—"

"Never mind what the Bible says. Tell me if she received any telephone calls while she's been here."

"Not while I was on."

"Check with Pete about nights."

"I have. That is, he mentioned it to me only this morning when I took over. Not a call, and what with her figure he thought it peculiar."

Waldo hung up and relayed all this to Duggan.

"What made you say she had it coming to her?" Duggan asked.

"Latching on to young Dean for one thing. Trying to take him away from Alice Spang. Boy, has that guy's mama got the dough. She's even got a watchdog-bodyguard to ride herd on him, she keeps him so loaded. No kidding."

"Bert Jackson? Is that his name?"

"You know about it?"

"A Miss Fernandez briefed me."

"That bird. She flops around in fogs feeling for things. I think she's half cracked."

"Possibly. Let me in Miss Sangford's apartment, will you, Waldo.

Waldo took a pass key from the desk drawer.

"Let's go."

While Duggan searched the Sangford unit with the zealot nicety of a Carrie Nation sniffing out a dram, the sun rose higher into the warmth of morning while the motel stirred to life and to the impact of snowballing rumors.

Among the feminine division these embraced such positively known facts as that that vampire had accidentally drowned—she had committed suicide—she had been dragged beneath the waves: (a) by Mrs. Dean, (b) by Mrs. Spang, (c) by Alice Spang, (d) by Ernest—she had fought madly for her life and had been bruised all over, several people knowing of several people who had heard her perfectly ghastly dying shrieks (sea gulls)—she had succumbed without a struggle while in a disgraceful drunken stupor —with the only point of complete agreement among the ladies being that Officer Day was a doll.

The local press—Ft. Lauderdale, Hollywood, Miami—was as yet chilled about the job and the incident was delicately dropped into the category of a sadly drowned tourist. As such it was to be quietly underplayed, with the virtuous hope being advanced that inadequate swimming winter visitors to our golden strands would take proper heed and would quit venturing into our gentle, delightful, azure blue sea before the efficient lifeguards came on duty and would thus be on hand to fish them out of it again.

Duggan ended his inch by inch search and had Roth take such photographs as he felt the county prosecutor could use in evidence. These included three sets of fingerprints on one of the bottles of Scotch which Jimmy had left. Duggan wanted them put through the mill.

Then he said to Waldo: "I'm about ready for young Dean."

Waldo looked at him with the pleading eyes of an unfed seal.

"Take it easy with the kid, will you, Bill? They're paying top seasonal rental and what's more she's got enough of the stuff to slam the pick of the legal hot shots in your face—if you step out of line."

He would not, Duggan promised, step out of line, and they walked to the Dean apartment and Waldo pressed the button for the chime. The sun smashed purple flame into the bougainvillaea in one corner of the patio and only the surf on the shore made any sound, and the chime died into this silence. Then the door opened and Duggan had his first view of Mrs. Dean.

Even though the hour was only half past eight she presented a

picture of competent preservation. Her gold hair shone from its brushing and the expensive delicacy of an imported brilliantine. Her face was in order, and her deceptively simple cotton dress suggested the freshness of jonquils on a sunny hill.

Waldo smiled managerially. "You've heard, I suppose," he said.

"Yes, I've heard. These lamentable, these stupid accidents!"

She played docilely along in her soft, rich voice while her eyes from their long-lashed corners flickered across Duggan.

"Always so tragic," she agreed. "Especially with the middle aged."

"Middle—Miss *Sang*ford?"

"Oh easily, I should think, a contemporary of my own. Won't you come in?"

"Thank you, I can't. I've the usual thousand things to do, and now with *this* on top of it. I just wanted to introduce Bill Duggan, our Chief of Police. Then I'll run along."

Mrs. Dean extended a firm, cold hand. "Chief Duggan?"

"Mrs. Dean."

They shook hands and Waldo ran along to attend to his thousand things—which were nothing more arduous than a head dive back onto a foam rubber mattress. Duggan followed Mrs. Dean into the living room where she asked him to sit down and then arranged herself in a formal posture on a lounge. She sat there, very composed, and observed him with a polite attention.

"I would like to talk with your son, Mrs. Dean."

"Ernest is asleep, Mr. Duggan. Drugged, really. He suffered a rather shocking experience this morning. Around daybreak to be exact. It came as a climax to a heavy night and the combination jolted his nerves severely. I insisted on his taking two of my pills. Luminol."

Duggan smiled back at her understandingly. A good deal more understandingly than she knew. He admired her technique in launching the attack against himself, the enemy.

"The shocking experience. You refer to his appointment with Miss Sangford?"

Mrs. Dean gazed at him steadily with eyes that were not quite violet, not quite green, and the social set of her smile remained unaltered.

"Of course you would know about that. I believe one of the barmaids—Francine—spread the word? Or anyone else having cocktails within earshot of Miss Sangford's voice. Have you ever noticed the muted quality of some bars, especially those that go in for Liberace lighting like the one here?"

"Yes, I have. An added decibel of sound in a person's voice—"

"Exactly. As for the rendez-

vous it never took place. Miss Sangford was lying on the sand, drowned, when Ernest went down to the shore. As I have said, the shock of it added to a terrific hangover—"

"I can well imagine." He added sympathetically: "It must have been pretty tough to make him fail to notify either the management or the police."

She looked back at him calmly and permitted him to light the cigarette she had taken from a box on the coffee table between them.

"Obviously that would occur to you, Mr. Duggan. It would occur to anybody. I was awake when Ernest returned. I heard him being violently ill by the beach door. You may have noticed its upper half is glassed? I went to him and could see the beach through the window panes. I saw that Porto Rican woman, Miss Fernandez, find Miss Sangford and then saw her go to the telephone booth at the lifeguard's shop. The call was to you, wasn't it, Mr. Duggan?"

"Yes."

"I felt confident that it would have been, and gave my full attention to Ernest. Bert helped me —Mr. Jackson, my son's friend. After we'd put Ernest to bed I looked out on the beach and you and that other officer had taken over."

Duggan let the explanation rest in a quiet that grew prolonged to a limit where the smile was gone from Mrs. Dean's carnation-painted lips.

She began to feel it intolerable and said: "Well, Mr. Duggan?"

"Did you also hear your son when he left for the beach, Mrs. Dean?"

"I am a very light sleeper and there is little that I do not hear at night. Ernest got up and went out not more than a quarter of an hour before I heard him return. In the condition that I've told you." Her expression grew more strained. "Is it the reason for the rendezvous that is puzzling you?"

"In a way."

"Now really, Mr. Duggan, with a woman of her type, why should it? My son is a perfectly normal young man."

"It is the secrecy that has me bothered."

"Nonsense. Were you never, at Ernest's age, shall we say similarly involved?"

"No, neither then nor now. You see I'm still a bachelor, Mrs. Dean."

It took a full moment for the implication to sink in and the effect of it on Mrs. Dean was appalling.

"Bachelor—bachelor?"

"Surely you knew that Miss Sangford was your son's wife?"

Her words were spaced like the death roll of a heart slowing down.

"I do not believe you, Mr. Duggan."

He took a paper from his jacket pocket and handed it to her.

"The marriage certificate," he said. "She had hidden it rather cleverly, among facial tissues. Evidently she was afraid it would be searched for."

He did not, she noticed, directly specify that the search would have been by Ernest, although obviously seeming to imply it. Her eyes lingered unbelievingly on the date, which was two months ago, and on the place, which was the borough of Manhattan.

"I did not know," she said with difficulty. She managed to stand up. "Would—would you be so kind as to leave me, Mr. Duggan? I find it impossible to concentrate."

"Perhaps after an hour or two, Mrs. Dean?"

"Thank you. Surely then, yes."

"If you will let me have the marriage certificate, please?"

"This? Oh, yes." The habit of power, the years of domination which, since her husband's death, she had enjoyed upon her solid, unassailable pedestal of a woman of social standing and of great wealth, all of those assets were returning in freshening trickles and she said in her normal manner: "Why do you want it?"

He placed the certificate in his pocket. "Possible evidence, Mrs. Dean," he explained.

"Of what?"

"Motive."

"I may seem stupid, but motive for what?"

"The murder of your son's wife, Mrs. Dean."

## V

THE HOUR WAS ten-thirty of that Friday morning when Dr. Sibley, fully breakfasted and accompanied by a stenographer entered the morgue in the new wing of Tropical General. They observed, resting on a broad table equipped with running water and adequate drainage, its surface brilliant under a flood of fluorescent lighting, the unclothed body of Miss Sangford.

From glassed-in cabinets along the wall Sibley selected in addition to the usual tools, a couple of Erlenmyer flasks. He prepared a silver nitrate solution, a potassium iodide solution and a starch citrate mixture. He took delicate precautions to insure that water would not contaminate the blood, wiping dry the surface of the heart, and the knife, and making certain that the pipette and the receiving flasks were dry.

He did such things as had to be done and then set the solutions to one side. He looked at his watch. Possibly towards tomorrow morning he could let Duggan know the result.

By noon he had completed such other tests and observations as the regular autopsy procedure made mandatory. Two things he

was prepared to let Duggan definitely know: Miss Sangford had been pregnant, and Miss Sangford had been drunk.

Duggan digested this preliminary report of Sibley's during a luncheon of broiled snook in the company of Officer Day.

"It's wrapped up," Day said. "The rest is mere routine."

Duggan deposited a fish bone on his plate and helped himself to some more coleslaw.

"You sound like Miss Fernandez," he said.

"I do? Well what do you know?"

"Until the Gettler test comes through we're sticking our necks out a mile if we so much as point a finger at him."

"I don't get it. Take the setup. Money-bags Mama ready to cut his allowance off if he steps out of line, and in her book wedding bells spell for whom the bell tolls—Boy, am I good."

"About as good as last week's herring."

"Nuts, Chief. What happens? He gets potted and wakes up married to Little Egypt and starts paying her off to keep her from telling Mama. And I suggest that Bloodhound Jackson is the go-between."

"That much I'll grant you."

"Chief, a child could do this with his little hands tied behind his back. Seriously, Mama carts him down here to chill to death for the winter and he runs into the Spang number and he's gone. *Real gone.*"

"Okay. And he's a married man."

"What's so funny about that?"

"I wouldn't know."

"So Sangford trails him. Why? Because she comes into her wits on one fine morning and finds out that she is in a delicate condition."

"Brother, are you slicing it nice."

"All right, so I was brought up refined like. Well, she knows the score and she figures it this way and she figures it that. If Mama finds out her apple pie is married he is out on his neck and headed for skid row. But. I say *but.*"

"Sure, sure—and the ace in the hole is a darling grandchild who—to use your refined language—is two months en route on the Storkville trolley and the fact makes Mama Dean starry-eyed with joy and her flinty heart just melts. Al, you have not only read a book. You have seen a movie."

"Cut it, Chief. Now what does Sangford find? She finds her legally wedded husband overboard about the Spang dame. So she takes second choice and says you will pay me off and pay through the nose. I will then quietly divorce you or get an annulment, whichever you like. The kid says he'll pay and she fixes it for the payoff to be down at the beach this morning at daybreak."

"Why? Why daybreak, Alan?"

"Can I read the minds of a couple of crazy kids?"

"If Sangford was a kid, bud, I'm a baby movie star."

"All right, so she's got a few miles on her. They close the deal and go for a swim to make the meeting look good, and lover boy sees it's a golden opportunity for yanking her under—with his troubles, big and little, gone forever. I'm telling you that Oswald Pinker, our worthy county solicitor, will love it. He'll be delirious."

"He'll be psychotic if we give him the case as it stands. It's still as phoney as a hustler's smile."

Miss Fernandez drew reflectively towards the end of her luncheon. She was a hearty eater and a deliberate one with very few epicurean tastes, and the food of the motel's restaurant did not desolate her appetite. There was an air of peculiar waiting. The room was unusually full and it occurred to her that death and the police had fused the variegated guests into a group which instinctively herded together and set itself apart as a unit, as being something special.

The focal point of the diners naturally was the table at which Mrs. Dean sat with her son and Bert Jackson. Miss Fernandez cordially approved of Mrs. Dean's decision upon this public appearance, terming it in a sense the bravado of position. Of Mrs. Dean's position in the social world, and this carrying of her own environment like a shield of glass around her.

Of secondary interest were the Spangs. Both the mother and daughter offered that setness of expression which renders the otherwise superb waxwork figures of Madame Tussaud's just short of being lifelike. They accomplished the physical acts of eating and speaking under the impossible effect of being in a state of arrested motion. Mrs. Spang displayed her mildewing prettiness in full exhibition style but it was no go, nor was the virginal loveliness of Alice any more than a flower-frail veiling for the gut ripping hurt of her love.

Miss Fernandez smiled.

The knowledge that Ernest Dean and Theda Sangford had been man and wife had passed the rumor stage and was an accepted fact. There was a fascination, even a charm about murder and a hundredfold so when the protagonists were right under your eyes.

Any notion of accidental drowning had been thrown out of the window. And over all—it was like viewing an artist on the high trapeze who at any moment might miss and plummet to death—was the chilling cliche that murder breeds. That it breeds *if* and *as* necessity dictates

—until the hand of the killer is stilled.

The seeming inactivity of the police, and of the county solicitor's office, and what appeared to be the blase attitude of their dawdling, was considered curious. By Miss Fernandez most of all. She considered it not only curious, but dangerous.

Such were the red wraiths in her mist, tentatively identified but with not enough clear assurance to permit her to indulge in solemn warnings, for her to say: You must guard yourself by light of heaven and in dark of night when the variety of death is legion. You must even look beneath the mask of love.

Would she be believed? Miss Fernandez sighed deeply over a forkful of lime pie. No more, certainly, than people had heeded the warnings of Cassandra or any of the ancient seeresses when the prophesies were not a rosy pink.

One gesture, however, she managed to make upon leaving the dining room when she found herself alongside of Alice Spang. Briefly she pressed the girl's hand and murmured: "Courage, little one! Take heart."

## VI

BY THREE O'CLOCK the wind had freshened in the south, rolling up moderate combers to fracture in spumy sheets along the beach and driving determined nature boys behind the shelter of canvas windbreaks. Small craft warnings were up from Palm Beach down through the keys.

Duggan, as he approached the Dean patio, noted Ernest and his personal St. Bernard Bert Jackson giving a studied impersonation of indolence on a couple of steamer chairs. Both stood as he walked in and both, in their trunks, were like copper-coated specimens of the "after" photographs in a physical culture magazine. Of the two, in the matter of chest mattresses, Bert had the edge on Ernest by about a fistful of hair.

Duggan said he was Chief Duggan and Ernest said yes, he knew. Then they all shook hands and sat.

"I guess Mother gave you a pretty good lineup on what happened," Ernest said.

"Yes," Duggan agreed pleasantly, "she sure did. From her somewhat limited point of view, of course."

"He means the marriage angle," Bert said. "He means her not knowing about it. Isn't that so, son?"

Ernest looked at Duggan with the glassy eyes of a fighter who has just recently been pulped. "I don't think I could make you understand."

"Try."

"You wouldn't by any chance be an only child?"

"No, there were eight of us

kids," said Duggan. "Split fifty-fifty, boys and girls."

"Then you wouldn't get it."

"Get what?"

"The responsibility. Being limelighted from the moment when dad passed on. You are now the man of the family stuff. Being enveloped." Ernest felt this wasn't strong enough and added: "Being eaten, you might call it."

"Deal that again, will you?"

Ernest sank into his gloom-drenched thoughts and Bert took over.

"It's this, Chief. What you see and what the world sees of Mrs. Dean is just the outside coat. A lot of polish and a lot of glitter. Well, that stuff is for the birds. The real woman, the inside woman is and always has been strictly family. I mean as a wife to her husband and a mother to Ernest, and since her husband died of complicated pneumonia it's been just Ernest. He is as hooked up to her as a Siamese twin and you know what happens when you slice *them* apart."

Just who, Duggan wondered, did Jackson think he was kidding? The answer was simple. Duggan. The thought of Mrs. Dean in the calm, age-wise role of a Whistler's Mother or any closed-shop family situation was too much for Duggan to stomach. A vain, jealous, inordinately possessive and tyrannical woman seemed more like it. One with a death clutch on her son. A strangle hold.

"I'm still off the beam," Duggan said. "Mr. Dean, tell me this if you don't mind. Naturally you knew of your mother's thoughts on marriage. Did she expect you to stay single all your life?"

Flush deepened the bronze of Ernest's cheeks. Embarrassment? Duggan wondered. Or was it the anger of reluctant hate?

"Not all of my life, no, Mr. Duggan. Only for all of hers."

"Still, you did get married."

"When dead drunk."

"Mr. Jackson—"

"Chief?"

"Isn't preventing anything of that nature a part of your responsibility?"

"Yes. But that night, Chief, was the night my sister died."

"Bert was called to her bedside," Ernest said. "In Brooklyn. Me, I picked up Theda in a bar. Got tangled. Got married."

"After Ernest told me she was throwing the hooks in him I met her and did what I could to get him out of it—to keep it covered up while we bargained," Bert said. "For over two months now I've been sitting on the hatch."

"What about this daybreak date, Mr. Dean? Were you reaching an agreement?"

"Yes. It's what I hoped."

"Why daybreak?" asked Duggan.

"It does sound sort of cloak-and-dagger, doesn't it? Theda wanted to have it out last night but I was tied up for dinner and for dancing. I couldn't tell her when I'd be back here."

"You and Miss Spang? And of course, Mr. Jackson?"

"Yes."

"The three of you were together continuously?"

"We were," Bert said, "until Ernest and I turned in."

"When was that?"

"Around three o'clock."

"Do you have separate bedrooms?"

"Yes."

"Mr. Dean, did you set an alarm clock for daybreak?"

"No. It would have waked up Mother. Bert woke me. He sat up and read."

"Did Mr. Dean sleep all of the time, Mr. Jackson?"

"If you mean did he get up and leave his room he didn't. I could see his door from where I was sitting."

So the watchdog had sat up and the watchdog had read. Had he, Duggan wondered, also napped? And if he had, during that straining stretch towards the break of day, were his eyes shut only to the door of Ernest's bedroom? Had he not failed to observe a possible emergence of Mrs. Dean as well?

"Mr. Dean, I should like to get this absolutely clear, please. Until you went down to the beach you were to all purposes in somebody's company. You did go down to the beach alone, didn't you?"

"Yes. Alone."

"For ten minutes? Fifteen?"

"About fifteen minutes."

"When you came upon your wife what did you do to determine whether she was still alive? Or that help, resuscitation would be useless?"

The question dropped with its hesitant fuse and the bronze of Ernest's cheeks underwent a chalky fade.

"Theda was dead. I just knew it."

"The dead are familiar to you?"

"No. My father—otherwise only Theda. And then I saw that Puerto Rican lady and got rattled. I guess you think I'm a pretty weak sister."

"I guess we all are at some time or other," said Duggan. "Did you touch her?"

"Theda? God, no."

"Well, let's spend a few minutes on her background. Her relatives, friends, what do you know about them?"

"Nothing."

"Perhaps you do, Mr. Jackson? From your talks with her. While, as you say, you were holding down the hatch?"

Bert shrugged a handsome

pair of shoulders. "She never said."

"Then how did you contact her? Where did she live?"

"I didn't. She contacted me."

"At the Deans?"

"Yes. She would fix up the time and a place and we'd meet. Mostly it was a pizza joint in the West Forties."

Duggan said to Ernest casually: "Did you know that your wife was pregnant?"

"I didn't until last night. How did you know?"

"Medical examiner's report."

"Last night when she stopped for a minute while I was waiting for Alice. She told me then."

"She put the screws on," Bert said, and added factually as though it explained everything and nothing further need be said about it: "She was a tramp."

Back in his bachelor quarters, which were an efficiency on the edge of town, Duggan tabulated the brief reports that had come through.

Miss Sangford's bathing cap had not been found.

Miss Sangford had a record and her prints were on file.

She had been booked twice. Once for attempted extortion, once on a badger game charge.

For the past two years she had been living in her own small New York apartment in the East Fifties, ostensibly as a model but presumably, from the list of men's names and numbers in a book beside her telephone, as a call girl.

He picked up his phone and dialed Operator. "It's Duggan, honey," he said.

"Oh, hello, Bill?"

"Got a New York telephone directory handy?"

"Sure have."

"Look up a number for me, will you please, honey?"

"Sure will, Bill."

He waited. She gave him a number. He did not bother to jot it down.

"Thanks, honey. Now get me Black's, will you? As quickly as possible."

He asked the motel night clerk to connect him with the bar.

"Jimmy? Duggan here."

"Hi, Sleuth," said Hart.

"I need some dope on Sangford."

"What kind?"

"Those two bottles of Scotch last night. Did she often pull that?"

"Maybe two or three times, which is a pretty good record when you think about it. She was only here a week."

"A lush?" asked Duggan.

"No more than most. She could hold it."

"What about men? Did she play the field?"

"No. Young Dean exclusive. When any of the other fanged sharpies tried they got the

broom. When are you going to pick him up, Sherlock?"

"Dean?"

"Who else?"

"You'd be amazed. Thanks, Jimmy. Be seeing you."

"Why you clam-lipped—"

Duggan hung up.

He indulged in a satisfying, jaw cracking yawn. He mused for a while on how stupid a clever criminal could get. Then he went to bed.

## VII

THE AFTERNOON wore on and gusty winds up to fifty sent palm fronds streaming like a madwoman's hair. With sundown the cocktail lounge housed a jam to its last banquette, and Jimmy Hart noted few absentees from among the regulars. Mrs. Dean wasn't there, Alice Spang and her mother weren't there, and Miss Fernandez was not there.

Miss Fernandez was in the living room of her apartment and was having a very tough time of it in trying to make up her mind. What she wanted to do was to go to Mrs. Dean and warn her of the probability that danger of a most desperate character lay before her.

On this Miss Fernandez would have staked her reputation in San Juan as a woman with an uncanny gift for predicting the turn of things to come. Actually there was little of the uncanny about it and Miss Fernandez's remarkably accurate forecasts were based on her sound deductive powers and the most elementary guideposts of common sense.

Finally, with a touch of grimness, Miss Fernandez opened the front door, braved the smash of wind around the pool's rim and fought her way to the Dean corner unit. The expression on Mrs. Dean's face when she greeted her was one of very frank annoyance.

"Miss Fernandez? I know you will understand, and will forgive me if I do not ask you in. My nerves are in no condition to entertain guests."

"I do not come here, Madame, to be entertained. My mission is pressing. I have come to instruct you in a parable."

Nothing could have been less fortunate than this opening remark. People did not "instruct" Mrs. Dean. It was an operation she reserved for her exclusive use and her temper invariably rose when, rarely, she would be confronted with such an attitude on the part of another.

But Miss Fernandez did not budge. She raised a hand with two fingers extended upright in a gesture she had once observed Cardinal Filipe Hernandos employ in the face of a recalcitrant penitent.

"It is my unshakable pur-

pose," she said simply, "to save your life."

Against her better judgment, Mrs. Dean did feel her curiosity being aroused.

"Let's get in out of this typhoon," she said, "and then you can tell me about it."

In the living room, in the comparative quiet induced by closed jalousies, Miss Fernandez detoured towards the point.

"There was once," she said, "a fish."

Mrs. Dean clenched her fingers. "Please, let's keep it simple, will you? No fish."

"A fish," Miss Fernandez went on inexorably, "who was in residence in a coral palace at the bottom of the deep, deep sea. It was, this fish, a monster and with a monster's appetite, which it had trouble in satisfying because it was totally blind."

"Look. This is perfectly fascinating but I simply have *not* got the strength—"

"Patience, Madame! One discloses another fish, equally monstrous but blessed with two baby eyes."

Mrs. Dean stood up. This fantastic rubbish was not only ridiculous but galling and she intended to put an end to it. Apart from herself being clearly cast as the monstrous blind horror in the tale the second fish was undoubtedly intended to represent her son. Unquestionably the woman was mad. There was that distinct look of introverted passion in her dark, accusing eyes.

"I must ask you to leave me," she said. "Go please—at once. I am not well—"

Disconcertingly, entirely unexpectedly, Miss Fernandez burst into tears which poured their crests from deep billows of shaken sobbing. It was certainly the last thing that Mrs. Dean had expected and she said rather stupidly: "I shall get you a glass of water."

She went into the service pantry and found that the pitcher of chilled water was empty. So she broke out ice cubes, with the usual time and bother that such tasks entail. It was several minutes before she returned to the living room with the water only to find Miss Fernandez gone and, oddly, like a clever magical trick, Mrs. Spang standing there in her place.

"That Puerto Rican woman let me in, dear. Then she positively swam past me in a flood of tears. Is she quite sane? At times I've wondered. And the weirdest thing—she kept muttering between sobs *'Blind, blind.'* Then something about danger and the foolish one not listening."

"She has some silly idea that my life is in danger. Of course she's crazy. She ought to be committed."

Little muscles of Mrs. Spang's

face tensed, giving her expression the quality of a plaster mask.

"Your—life, dear?"

"Yes. Apparently I am a monstrous fish at the bottom of the sea, eating everything in sight, even though I'm as blind as a bat."

"Are you serious? She really said things like that?"

"Yes. She barged in and I couldn't stop her wild talk."

"But how utterly weird. You don't suppose—"

"Suppose what?" asked Mrs. Dean.

"No, no, it's too absurd. That she could have second sight, or extrasensory perception as they call it? Like those frightful tests and things going on at Duke University? Something about blindfolds and colored cards."

Mrs. Dean said with a venom so sharp that the words sank into Mrs. Spang like little knives: "If any colored cards or rabbits are going to be pulled out of the hat—I intend to pull them."

The plaster look set more rigidly until it seemed that when Mrs. Spang moved her lips her skin would crack.

"My dear, you look so intense. I simply don't follow you?"

Mrs. Dean laughed unmusically. "They say that patience is a virtue. Fools! It's the most valuable weapon that exists."

"Weapon?" Mrs. Spang inquired.

"Yes, weapon. And I intend to employ it to the hilt."

"Dear — is it possible — I mean, do you *know* something?"

"About the drowning of that despicable harlot?" She looked levelly at Mrs. Spang for a long moment, dissecting with a surgeon's touch those particles of character and avarice and tigerish rapacity which lay beneath the woman's creamed and tinted skin. She said: "What do you think?"

## VIII

MRS. DEAN was a shaken woman. The world, her world, where she had lived with every assurance of dependable continuance had exploded in her face. She loved her son. Of that there could be no doubt. And all of her restrictions upon his freedom were not, as she saw them, restrictions at all but rather a constant imposition of wise guidance.

The diseased nature of the intensity of ownership that she felt about Ernest did not occur to her ever, and she honestly believed that everything she did was for his good.

And who better than herself could shelter him with this sturdy umbrella against the dangerous storms of life? Certainly not a child like Alice, especially

with her type of covetous fortune hunting mother like Mrs. Spang. No, Alice couldn't, no more than could the others have. What had been their names—Estelle? Marguerite? That rather dangerous one—Ethel?

Squashed. Buglike, beneath a diamond studded heel.

Then this.

The unbelievable treachery of a secret wife.

A dead one, now.

Murdered.

Her features hardened. There was a debt connected with murder. The guilty paid it and sometimes, rarely, the innocent. Had it been a mistake to let the affair go so far? She caught herself up. It was her false knowledge that had betrayed her, as from all she had known about it the Sangford menace had only existed during the past week.

Mrs. Dean had never felt like this before, with her mental brilliance fractured into violent shards that were nothing but meaningless strays of thoughts. Certainly she had never felt so miserable, so downright sick at heart and all straight through. Nor so sweaty chill with ice cold anger.

She noticed without much interest that it was one o'clock. It would be several hours before Ernest and Bert returned from Mario's gambling club on the county line. She had insisted upon Ernest's going, as she wanted him to follow the regular pattern of his evenings, to flaunt his unconcern in the face of a solidifying public opinion that was outrageously unjust.

Her sigh was an exclamation point, as sharp as a stiletto of Damascus steel. There would be justice, yes. But it was she who would deal it out.

Mrs. Dean seldom drank alone but she felt the need of a sustaining jolt now. A good stiff gin and tonic. In the service pantry it occurred to her as odd that only one bottle of tonic water should be in the refrigerator. She could distinctly recall that earlier in the day there had been three. Neither Ernest nor Bert ever drank tonic water, both disliking its bitterish quinine flavor. Possibly the maid? A Bahama Negress with British tastes?

She put ice cubes in a tall glass and a double shot of gin. The cap of the tonic water for once did not stick as though it had been soldered on. It came off quite easily under the first leverage of the bottle opener. She stirred the drink and carried it, untasted, back towards the living room, pausing in the dark hallway to close the beach door which the wind apparently had blown open.

She decided that the living room lounge would be the proper setting for her discovery by Ernest upon his return. She

would be lying there in a frightening dead faint as a result of a severe attack of the heart, brought on by his unspeakable act of deceit. From there she would proceed to the matter of Alice Spang.

She set the gin and tonic on the coffee table before the lounge, sat down, and then picked up her handbag from where she generally tossed it on returning to the apartment, against an end pillow. She rummaged among its contents for the vial of strychnine tablets which, conspicuously placed upon the table, would bear mute testimony to the mortal shock that she had suffered.

She became aware that the vial was empty.

She sat motionless while an arctic cold embraced every fraction of her body and while her eyes, with a dreadful speculation, traveled towards and rested on the glass that contained the gin and tonic water.

The single bottle where there had been three, and the cap that had flipped off with a flick!

How terribly, terribly clever, she thought. What would better conceal the bitter taste of strychnine than the bitter flavor of quinine? They were so much akin that it would be difficult to tell them apart. Gently her hand reached out. Gently, experimentally, she sipped, allowing the liquid globules of the drink to spread upon her tongue.

Then, abruptly, she spat them out.

Was it the confusion of horrific belief that made the bitterness seem unusually acute? A conviction that the contents of the glass contained liquid death? Curiosity once had caused her to ask her doctor what a death from strychnine poisoning would be like. She recalled that the symptoms begin about ten or fifteen minutes after administration—a premonition of impending calamity, a shuddering, a sudden violent tetanic spasm, a stiff sardonic grin and—this disturbed Mrs. Dean more than anything else—the mentality of the victims during those convulsions remained usually clear.

How did it end? That moment when death blasted you smack out of life—yes, she remembered now. It crushed you into its skeleton oblivion either from exhaustion or, in the midst of a paroxysm, from asphyxia.

Mrs. Dean replaced the glass upon the table beside the empty vial.

Oddly, she felt fresh-born. Had others felt so, too? Others who had been given, as she was, this chance to keep on living through the coming generous years? Really—so close had been her brush with it—to return from the dead to life.

There was no question in her

mind whatever but that the bottle of tonic water had been loaded with a lethal dose of strychnine—and then recapped. That the other two remembered bottles had been disposed of so that there would be no choice. And no one but herself was accustomed to the tonic's use, a matter of common knowledge to any of the regulars who patronized the bar—as were the ever present tablets of strychnine to be used in the event of a sudden attack.

The empty vial? Why had it not been disposed of too? But of course. It had purposely been left to be found as a grim signpost that in her shock and heart wrenching disillusion over the beastly Sangford situation she had taken her own life.

She entered her second emotional phase, being through now with the exaltation of still being alive. Like a dark tide within her rushed the full surge of the vengeance that would be hers. She wondered what the death penalty was in Florida and felt pretty certain that it was the electric chair.

Her first thought was to preserve the drink as evidence. It was indicative of her shaken state of mind that she failed to realize that the trial would be held for the wilfull drowning of Theda Sangford and not for this unsuccessful attempted homicide upon herself.

The lazy minutes of the clock had moved to one-fifteen.

She returned to the service pantry and fished the empty tonic water bottle and its cap from the garbage can. Among the utensils in a drawer she located a funnel. These things she carried back into the living room and set them on the empty coffee table. Empty?

Her electrified look pinned its surface. The drink and the strychnine vial were gone. The cold of her anger was replaced by the clammy sweat of fright. The beach door which so recently she had closed— It was not the wind that had blown it open. Not originally. Not until in an excess of stealth the intruder had failed to shut it securely after creeping inside from the outer night.

Mrs. Dean's dread reached its saturation point as she realized that her reactions to finding the strychnine vial empty had been overseen by this intruder, and it must be obvious that the nipped poison attempt would boomerang into exposure and arrest. Frightened almost to the point of nausea she wondered whether this glorious pulse of living, which but so briefly had seemed secured, was crashing back into jeopardy.

A switch clicked, numbing Mrs. Dean within a paralyzing darkness that froze the vocal muscles with which, in her ex-

tremity, she wished to scream. A timeless moment of graveyard hush was broken only by twin breathings, one of which was her own.

The curved fingers of a strangler clamped about her throat.

## IX

Miss Fernandez from her observation post at a jalousie in her own living room saw the living room Venetian blinds of the Dean apartment go dark. She noted the time by her wrist watch: one twenty-three. A feeling of foreboding had held her at this vigil during the past half hour and no one either had entered the Dean apartment or had left. Not by the front door. There was, Miss Fernandez reflected, the door that opened on the beach.

Her dour thoughts were confirmed when the Venetian blinds of Mrs. Dean's bedroom failed to indicate that lamps had been turned on in order that Mrs. Dean might retire. She looked at her wrist watch again and saw that five minutes had passed. Mrs. Dean would not prepare to retire in the dark. This, Miss Fernandez considered a purely academic deduction.

Her thoughts phrased themselves in the stilted elegance of early Latin-American drama. Something was amiss. Her rebuff earlier in the evening at the hands of Mrs. Dean had been a severe one and it was with the greatest strength of character that she forced herself to face a further ordeal. She threw a velvet stole about her shoulders as a shield against the chill night wind and made her way around the swimming pool's rim.

There was no answer to the chime. Miss Fernandez opened the front door and stepped into the pitch darkness of the room. As she had expected, the light switch was similarly placed to her own. She pressed it, flooding the scene with amber. Mrs. Dean's body lay tossed on the carpeting near the lounge.

A tongue tip protruded. The eyes gave the unpleasant impression of dropping from their sockets. The face was a dusky blue.

Miss Fernandez touched a wrist. The flesh was warm. She felt for and found no pulse. The mirror of her compact held against the nostrils remained unclouded. They were simple tests and frequently inconclusive but they were the only ones which Miss Fernandez knew.

She was completely calm. Her nerves, from having many times faced it, were immune to a violent death. She wished to contact Chief Duggan and to have things remain exactly as they were until he got there. To accomplish this meant avoiding

the furor that would follow her putting the call through the front office switchboard.

From the strong draft in the hallway she imagined the beach door would be open. It was and she left it so, and went to the telephone booth attached to Oscar Bjorgsen's beach wear shop. With the glow from her cigarette lighter she looked up the number and dialed.

"Chief Duggan?"

"Yes?"

"It is Loreta Fernandez who speaks."

"Yes, Miss Fernandez?"

"It concerns Mrs. Dean. She is choked dead."

Duggan took the news in one admirable stride. "Where are you?"

"The telephone cubicle of the lifeguard. You would wish things to be untouched. I am not unversed in the police aspects of crime. The motel switchboard, you understand?"

"Is she in her apartment?" asked Duggan.

"Yes."

"You did the right thing. Tell me, can you stand going back? Maybe wait out in the patio until I get there?"

"I shall permit no one to enter until you come."

"Ten minutes, then."

Oddly, she said: "There is no rush. I think we both know that."

She hung up, and Duggan had the strong impression that in her peculiarly melodramatic and witchcraft fashion she had determined the identity of the killer and the motive for the crimes. And this knowledge, he thought with a good touch of grimness, was about as safe to cart around as a Molotov cocktail, especially in view of her publicized habit of groping for things in mists.

Before leaving his quarters he put through a call to Dr. Sibley.

"Frank? This is Duggan."

"Oh, yes, Bill?"

"Another one. Mrs. Dean. Strangled."

"At Black's?"

"Yes, in her apartment."

"Want me?"

"No. I'll ship her to Tropical. But I want this and I want it bad. The Gettler test on Sangford. Can you jump the gun on that? Make it now?"

Sibley counted hours.

"Well, the solutions have been standing thirteen, fourteen hours. I guess possibly."

"Thanks, Frank."

"I'll do my best, Bill," said Dr. Sibley.

Duggan hung up, only to dial again, several times, making the regular arrangements—an ambulance from Tropical, Roth to take pictures, a technician for fingerprints, and Officer Day whom he picked up and drove with him towards Black's.

Day, of course, had the job wrapped up. "It's as plain as the nose on your face, Chief."

"Let's not get personal, Pinkerton."

"It's so plain that it falls into slots. Like pinballs. Secret wife —I am speaking now of Sangford."

"That I gathered."

"Both her, plus unwanted child, stashed for good on ice and the field all clear to gather in the Spang number in a legal marriage with the exception of one thing."

"Mama."

"Exactly right. We were pinpointed heads not to case her as next on the list."

Duggan said with a deadly seriousness: "We weren't, Alan. I was."

"I kept saying we should have nabbed him, Gettler test or no Gettler test. Didn't I?"

"You did."

"So now he gives his watchdog the slip and chokes the last hurdle to his happiness to death. How long does it take to choke, Chief?"

"Depends. Usually only a few minutes, from the effects of asphyxia, cerebral anemia and shock."

"No kidding! I had it taped as simply lack of wind."

"A lush, if he's hitting it, gets it quicker and with less bother. With mugging the victim can kick off at any time from shock while struggling, even before asphyxia is complete."

"I wouldn't line her up as a lush, would you?"

"No, I'd figure her for a good stiff fight. I want you to get the scrapings from her fingernails and get them to Sibley. He'll know what to do with them."

"You figure she raked him?"

"Probably. May have gouged the wrists, backs of the hands. Usually there's a sign." Duggan sheered somewhat abruptly: "What do you know about the lifeguard? Jorgenson? Bjorgensen?"

"Oscar?"

"Yes, Oscar."

"He is hell on skirts. Right now he's playing a blonde number from Vero Beach who's curb hopping at Hank's drive-in and—"

"—and her husband is sending him mash notes from the Ku Klux Klan."

"Gee, Chief, how did you know?"

"I get around," said Duggan, "and I'm not interested in his love life. Can you depend on him? Can he keep his trap shut?"

"About his morals, Chief, I wouldn't know."

"No matter. I'll find out for myself."

"Why?"

"Got a job I want him to do." They drew up in the mo-

tel's parking lot. "I'm going to turn the routine over to you. Stick in the apartment and when the boys come roll it."

"Where will you be, Chief?"

"I'll be around."

## X

AFTER LOOKING at the body and implanting in his mind a photographic impression of the living room and other quarters of the apartment, which occupied him only a matter of minutes, Duggan left Day in charge and then joined Miss Fernandez on the patio.

The wind had tapered to a stiffish breeze and stars were developing in the sky. The entrance light was on and its glow washed yellowly over the bougainvillaea and the trimmed hibiscus hedge that separated the unit's patio from the Spangs. It touched with saffron the high complexion of Miss Fernandez's dusky cheeks and added an almost catlike glow to her somber brown eyes.

"What was it really caused you to come over here?" he asked.

"As I announced in our initial brevity, the lights. They went out. No others came on."

"This premonition of," Duggan sought the word she had used, "of amissness, was there nothing more definite? More concrete?"

"What would one wish? The lights in a salon go out. The lights in a boudoir do not turn on. No lights turn on. No person departs. Not, that is, by the front door. One specifies a door in the rear to the beach, left open when the killer in a frenzy fled."

"Miss Fernandez, I don't want to force the point, but I want you to think back during that half hour or so when you told me you were watching. Was there nothing, no incident no matter how trifling, that you can remember?"

A slight quiver skimmed the expanses of her body as the fact struck home that Duggan deliberately and with considerable obviousness had winked. There was no doubt about it. Miss Fernandez clutched back through her memory of U. S. crime procedure as she had culled it from the paperback translations. More than once a smart detective had tipped a witness that their conversation was being overheard, usually by some mechanical device concealed behind a picture. Was this deliberate wink such a tip?

She thought it was. Her gaze traveled casually about the patio, dwelt less casually on the hibiscus hedge on the other side of which was the patio of Mrs. Spang, the desperate mother who was making her last stand.

The significance of the wink

became plainer still. It not only indicated the probability of ears, but it invited cooperation as well. Surely an affirmation of the question that had been asked. Being both at heart and by national temperament a plotter of great aplomb she seized this role of undercover conspirator with a pleasurable sort of gusto.

There was a standardized pattern for the setup and she followed it.

"Ah, now that I reflect—"

A brief smile assured her that she was on the right track.

She continued: "It is—how can I express it to you? A something delicate as a shadow—"

Duggan suggested helpfully: "In a mist?"

"A mist, yes. Very black. Right now this thing eludes, but it will come back. Perhaps the subconscious while I repose. Perhaps by dawning."

"Perhaps like yesterday morning around daybreak, when you make a practice of taking a dip and picking up shells?"

"But of course. Always it is at dawning when thoughts are best." She added darkly: "When the waters cool."

Duggan cut her short, having gained his point. At least he hoped he had—felt pretty sure of it. He couldn't come right out and say: "Set yourself up as a sitting duck." But that was what he had meant, and he believed that Miss Fernandez understood. If he had judged her correctly she would go through with it with stubborn courage.

"I'm going to the bar," he said. "I want to try and locate young Dean."

He walked away, out of the yellow light, and into the dark with its descending wind. Miss Fernandez moved close to the hibiscus hedge and said softly, experimentally: "M a d a m e Spang?"

Something much like a whimper answered. Then the faded face of Mrs. Spang was rising like a cobwebbed moon across the hedge and saying: "I'm worried stiff. She shouldn't have gone off that way."

"One does not select the manner of one's ultimate departure."

"I don't mean Mrs. Dean. I mean Alice. Quite a while ago —several *hours* ago. She said she was running over to the cocktail lounge for a while to watch the television. I finally got so worried I went in search of her. Jimmy and Francine both said she hadn't been there at all. She's gone. *Just gone.*"

Miss Fernandez moistened her lips.

"How is it that you are aware of Mrs. Dean's death?"

"It's because I've been sitting here worrying and I saw you come over and go in and light the light. I looked in a jalousie and it was ghastly, horrible— And now on top of it Alice."

"Madame, you have my sympathy. Do not concern yourself about that lovely child. She goes with God."

"It's all very well for you to say that. But I tell you I'm weak. Just sick and weak."

"A drink?"

"Yes. You'll come with me?"

"That is a certainty, Madame."

## XI

"I'M TELLING you," Jimmy Hart said to Duggan, "that's all I know. Dean and Jackson shoved off for Mario's about nine to try and get even—and they haven't been back again. Mrs. Spang tottered in around an hour ago and buzzed Francine and me. Did we know where dear Alice was? Had we —say, get a load of who's just coming in, Bill. Old Faithful Jackson and with no sonny-boy in tow. He looks like an uncooked pancake."

Jackson rather did, with his deep tan drained by tiredness, or worry into a pasty gray. He came directly to the bar and to Duggan, and said: "I lost him."

"At Mario's?" asked Duggan.

"Yes. Is it true what that guy outside said? She's dead?"

"Yes."

"Choked?"

"Yes."

"When?"

"Not long," Duggan told him.

"I ought to take three whiskies, as fast as I can put them away."

"Why?"

"It's not good. That's why."

"When did Dean skip?"

"Maybe around ten," said Jackson. "He went up to Mario's office to get him to cash a check. Mario did and left him there finishing a drink. When he got back Ernest was gone and Mario figured he was down at the wheel."

"Ten was almost four hours ago," said Duggan.

"I know it."

"It's a long time to look."

"It's a long town, beach, and county. I covered every joint we've ever been to."

"In what?"

"What do you mean in what?"

"Didn't he take his car? I should have thought he would."

"No. I figured he hightailed it with some digger or newfound buddy-buddy or took a cab. He'd been lifting them steady all day, and believe me for him it's been one tough day."

"Of course you checked back here?"

"You think I'm crazy? Would I want her to know I'd let him get slopped up and give me the slip? He's so fouled up you can't tell what he'd do."

"One thing I guess we can

bank on. Sons just don't kill their mothers."

Jimmy put an interested oar in. "But," he informed them rather confusedly, "sometimes they do kill their wives."

"That tramp?" Jackson said disgustedly. "You're in a cloud, brother. Ernest wouldn't kill a fly. It's just that at times he blacks out and could maybe start swimming to China for all we'd know. You going to check with Mario, Chief?"

"Yes."

"Maybe you can get something out of him. When I kept pestering him he gave me the baby-blue-eyes runaround. 'No,' he said, 'I have no idea what could have happened to Mr. Dean. Why don't you earn your dough and go look?' Then actually he titters. The clammy jerk."

Miss Fernandez and Mrs. Spang came in and Mrs. Spang spotted Bert Jackson. The two women headed towards them and Duggan eased away, giving Miss Fernandez the faint lowering of a left eyelid and getting a jolt to find her giving him the same.

The lights were on in Oscar Bjorgsen's quarters of the beach wear shop. Duggan knocked and being called to come in found himself facing a typical Norse giant, currently attired in a lime shantung sport shirt and dark gray slacks.

"Bjorgsen?" Duggan asked.

"Yes. You're Chief Duggan?"

"Yes. I want to use the phone booth for a few minutes, then I'd like a talk."

Bjorgsen looked at an expensive wrist watch that told, to his constant bewilderment, the day, the month and the phases of the moon. It was a gift from an appreciative coal baroness from Pittsburgh.

"Glad to, Chief. She'll wait."

"Vero Beach?" asked Duggan.

"That's right. What do we talk about? Sangford? Mrs. Dean?"

"In a way."

"Boy, is this crib getting loused up with stiffs."

Duggan agreed and going to the outside phone booth shut himself in, looked up a private number in a small notebook, and dialed.

A pleasant young woman's voice said: "Mario's Club Continental, good morning?"

"Duggan speaking. Police chief, Halcyon."

"Oh, yes, Chief?"

"I'd like to talk with Mario. About young Dean. His mother's just been killed."

"Oh, no! I mean it's so terrible always, you just never can get used to it. Please wait a minute, Chief."

Duggan waited.

A well-polished voice said:

"Chief Duggan? I am Mario. Did I get it straight about Mrs. Dean?"

"Yes. Strangled."

"When?"

"Maybe an hour ago. Maybe more or less."

"Then that is okay."

"About Dean?" asked Duggan.

"Yes."

"You're dead sure?"

"Nobody can be dead sure," said Mario. "If so, I would be out of business. I do know he called me up around that time and said he was keeping the car all night. He said he was calling from Palm Beach."

"What about this car?"

"I will tell you. He came to my office around ten. I cashed a check for a thousand. He asked to borrow a car for several hours. I keep some on hand for the convenience of my guests."

"Why didn't he use his own?"

"It was his wish to evade Mr. Jackson."

"Why?"

"He did not say. He told me very little. In fact he told me nothing and I did not inquire. He asked me to clam-up about the car, so when Mr. Jackson blew his top I made with the old double. Mr. Dean is too valuable a customer."

"This car—a Caddy convertible, '56, I suppose?"

Mario laughed agreeably. "What else would you expect? Black, white walls, and a lemon top. No neon lights."

"Would you have the license number?"

Mario consulted a notebook containing the club's less vital statistics and gave Duggan a number.

"There was also this," he said. "No matter what he was up to I figured the kid needed a break. That mother of his was keeping him in Alcatraz and speaking impersonally I am glad that she is cooked."

Duggan thanked Mario and hung up. He put through several calls arranging for a statewide general on the car for all detective cruisers and radio patrols, and the several radio night disc jockeys, requesting that Ernest Dean be in turn requested to contact Chief Duggan at Black's. The nature of the request: *Urgent.*

He dialed Tropical. He asked to be connected with Dr. Sibley.

Sibley said shortly: "Bill?"

"Yes, Frank. Any luck?"

"Plenty. Mr. Gettler's test is all done and successfully, too. You were absolutely right. And to that fact, under oath, will I so testify in court. In my pearl gray suit. What makes you so smart?"

"I just happen to know floaters, that's all. I was a lifeguard for a while."

"Even so. That might account for your build but not for your brains."

"You've got the boys all wrong," said Duggan. "Catch one with clothes on and he'll slap a Phi Beta Kappa key in your face."

"Incidentally, where is our Mrs. Dean?"

"Probably on the way."

"So far I've received nothing but an envelope containing fingernail scrapings—courtesy of Officer Day."

"Got anything on them yet?"

"Yes, microscopically, not chemically. No flesh. No blood. Just some rubber."

"Rubber?"

"That's right, Bill. Red rubber. Like from rubber gloves such—I suggest to your eagle-hawk mind—as women use when they dye their hair."

"What's an eagle-hawk?"

"Do we care?" said Sibley.

"No."

"Did Mrs. Dean dye her hair?"

"Sure she did, but with her dough she didn't do it in rubber gloves. It was done in a box seat at some Emile's or Antoine's." *But,* Duggan thought reflectively, *the down-to-her-last-nickel Mrs. Spang would do her own hair dyeing.*

"I told you you were a bright boy," Sibley said. "When do you ring up the curtain on the final act?"

"Maybe around daybreak. Maybe."

"Well, good hunting to you."

"Thanks, Frank. I'll save the fox's tail for your handlebars."

"Do that. Be seeing you."

Duggan hung up. Good-bye, he thought, to scratches on the strangler's hands and wrists. Rubber gloves came well up on the forearm. He stood for a short moment watching the pale line of combers crash and cream hissing up the sand. They had movement in the circumscribed arena of this private world where nothing else moved at all. Only the wind, which you could hear and feel but couldn't see at all.

In his mind's eye he projected a picture of daybreak, of a lone figure in her swim suit of flamingo, bravely defenseless in all this emptiness, with eyes cast sandward in a search for shells. And then the invitation for a mutual swim.

He returned to Bjorgsen's quarters.

He said: "Look, Bjorgsen. Here's what I'd like for us to do."

He outlined his plan, and thus set in motion one of the most unpredictable boners of his official existence.

The motel slept and the minutes flagged on with their pacing. The units were dark in this sleep with the exception of the

living room jalousies of the Deans.

Duggan went in and was pleased to note that the body had been taken away. He gave a moment of audience appreciation to the duet of gurgles and snores that were being broadcast from Station Day, who slouched almost flat in a lounge chair, and from the room where Bert Jackson lay entirely flat on his bed.

Careful not to alarm the watchdogs by barking and waking them up, Duggan quietly cased the room more in detail than he had before. This careful search disclosed an all but unnoticeable tip of metal projecting under the front fringe of the lounge. It was a funnel, and with respectful regard for fingerprints he placed it on the coffee table.

The thing was incongruous, and especially its location from having rolled or been kicked beneath the lounge, and the incongruous always excited him. What was a funnel used for? To pour something into something through the neck of a bottle. Duggan, he congratulated himself, you are quick as a whippet. The funnel's size seemed about right for a beer bottle or one for soft drinks.

He pursued the puzzle into the service pantry. Apparently no answer there. He rooted around and found a plastic vegetable bag, got the funnel, bagged it, and stashed it behind china on the shelf of a wall cabinet. He went on with his casing against continued mood music of snores.

## XII

THE HOURS ROLLED, and the wind sank from stiff to breeze, and the anger went largely out of the ocean and its movement, with the exception of an occasional mutinous kickup, grew smooth like a strong sleeper's chest.

The night still held, but the feel of dawn was in the air, and Miss Fernandez prepared. She deliberately advertised her awakening by turning on both bedroom and living room lights. Then she knelt and said her morning prayers. They included a request that God, through the offices of Chief Duggan, would so arrange her prospects that she might view again her beloved San Juan, her beloved fishing villages on the south coast and little mountain hamlets in the heart of Puerto Rico's coffee country, and her favorite "out on the island" spots of Ponce, Parguera, Mayaguez and Coamo.

Having finished up this comprehensive Cook's Tour she exchanged her nightdress for the flamingo swim suit. From the cutlery drawer in the service

pantry she selected a small paring knife and satisfied herself as to its point and cutting edge. She was, with knives, in the nature of a connoisseur. She dropped it into the bag she carried for shells.

Darkness succeeded to the thin spread of pre-dawn and as the moment approached, became zero hour near, she experienced a tension of the little nerves. This was in no manner connected with any heart restrictive qualities of fear—such as had held the screams unborn in the throat of Mrs. Dean—for she was content that Duggan would never have advanced his semi-subtle suggestion—to speak of it kindly—without having proper guards for her safety in mind.

The tension was rather that of a prima donna waiting the cue to bring her on stage, and a band of pale raspberry in the eastern sky warned her that the cue had come. She turned out lights, then stepped into the pastel hush of the patio and it seemed that she alone in the world were awake, but she knew this was not so.

Unless Duggan's calculations and her own were at serious fault the killer, at this moment, masked behind some flora of nature or the structural jobs of man, would already be giving her the lethal eye.

She walked leisurely past the black pearl surface of the swimming pool and towards the vaulted passageway leading to the beach. Its tiled flooring was glassy cool, and then the sand was beneath her feet and carpeted before her to the creamy sheet of foam as each comber spent its journey on the shale. She eyed the surf professionally, being an excellent swimmer, and thought it moderate, being neither dabble flat nor undertow strong.

Miss Fernandez crossed the dry section pitted with the footsteps of yesterday, and as yet unraked for the morning, and came to the table-top firmness of the moist packed shelf, clean washed by the tide on ebb.

She assumed the familiar pose, the slight stoop and the downcast look of the seeker after shells. But her eyes were blind and such few as she gathered were worthless specimens picked up for effect at random. She had reached the northern limit of Black's private beach when she sensed—certainly it was impossible to hear footfalls on the sand—the presence of someone behind her.

"Good morning," the voice said pleasantly.

She permitted the bag of shells to drop and then fumbled for it clumsily, but before she could retrieve it it was picked up.

"So sorry, Miss Fernandez. I hope I didn't startle you. Al-

though obviously I must have."

She smiled noncommittally. "One is so accustomed to isolation at this hour."

"After that ghastly business of last night I thought an early dip might be bracing."

She shopped for a platitude. "Sleep is difficult during moments of drama."

"Impossible, I found it. Although we often think we've stayed awake through the night when actually we've napped."

She wondered for how long this prattle would slide on with the balance of a tightrope walker, before the hands would initiate their blunt purpose which was to kill her—to silence her for good.

At the moment the hands were fumbling with the bag of shells, pressing the contents exploratively through the denim cloth and pausing—she could tell the precise instant — when they identified the shape and substance of the paring knife. Then the bag was tossed carelessly down on the sand.

"Let's take a plunge, Miss Fernandez. Shall we?"

"If you wish."

Strongly fatalistic by nature Miss Fernandez glanced fractionally at the shell bag, humped now so uselessly with its improvised stiletto on the beach.

Companionably they walked, two people alone on this plateau of emptiness which embraced the sands and the surface of the sea and the sky above. A broken wave hissed swift along the shelf. It curled with spent force past their ankles, warm and clean and sharp in this remainder of its former power. They dove through a roller that crested in, emerged into the long smooth troughs and moderate hills, and swam out to the flatter heave.

They stopped for a breather, treading water, and Miss Fernandez kept with the careless motion of her arms a wary space between.

"You swim well, Mr. Jackson," she said.

"Almost as well as you do." Bert's eyes turned beachward and found it devoid of life. But you never knew. He gauged the dawn. Pretty bright by now. And soon the sun. "I think we've come out far enough," he said. "Don't you?"

Several yards from where the feet of Bert and Miss Fernandez were treading water, and at a slightly lower level, Duggan and Bjorgsen observed the lazy paddlings from their submerged retreat. They were equipped with aqualungs, weighted belts, flippers and masks from the skin diving stock of the beach wear shop.

The light was strong enough for good vision, sifting down through the ocean ceiling of opalescent amber grays. As Bert's legs drifted with imper-

ceptible purpose gently closer to the legs of Miss Fernandez both men with fishlike ease came closer, too.

Duggan was an immeasurably relieved man. The situation was well in hand. Two witnesses, himself and Bjorgsen, would apprehend the killer in his third and last attack upon a human life. His admiration for Miss Fernandez knew no bounds.

Gently between the two sets of dangling legs, gently the gap decreased.

Now the legs of Bert were quite still and the whipcord muscles tensed along the thighs until with the power crash of a barracuda Bert dove and grasping Miss Fernandez by her ankles yanked her below.

Not unlike a barracuda himself, Duggan struck.

In addition to his muscular strength he had the tremendous advantage of shock surprise. Bert had no conceivable way of knowing what it was that had hit him and his first thought was that the arm which lashed around his throat, mugging him, was the tentacle of an octopus. He instantly gave up his intentions regarding Miss Fernandez and panicked into a violent effort to shed the stranglehold of this monster of the deep.

While this was going on Bjorgsen had gripped and surfaced with Miss Fernandez where he threw back his mask and asked solicitously: "Are you okay?"

Miss Fernandez discarded a final mouthful of salt water. Although still a little confused over incredible rescue by this goggled creature—now identified—she felt as strong as an ox and quite generally fine.

"A little damp inside, Mr. Bjorgsen. But okay. But Mr. Duggan—he is, one gathers, below? Should we not create a diversion? Assist?"

"Why?" Oscar asked reasonably. "Unless they surface by the next ten seconds that Jackson crumb will be a windless cadaver. Duggan's got a 'lung. One thing—"

"Yes?"

"Jackson. His being the killer. To me it don't make sense."

"You will find, Mr. Bjorgsen, that when the evidence and motive for these tragedies are disclosed—the greed, the lust, the knives of fear, the repressions of a caste-hungry soul—it is the only solution that does."

Duggan's masked head broke water first. Then Bert's sullen good looks emerged, too—only to have his jaw get a knockout crash from Duggan's fist.

Duggan unmasked. "You two all right?" he asked.

"Tops, Chief," Oscar said.

"Stick together. I'll tow this squid ashore."

They offered an uneventful flotilla-in-quartet on their pas-

sage towards the beach. Uneventful, that is, until they reached the line of surf when towering in its comparative magnitude up behind them a seventh wave barreled in at express speed.

Duggan's reaction to this ever unpredictable phenomenon of the sea was to find himself upended and his face slammed with piston force down into the ocean floor while his tow, the flaccid Bert, became galvanized into a dynamo and with a forceful kick in the small of Duggan's back broke loose. The inescapable confusion of the moment held the tumbling uncertainties of earthquake.

Being unencumbered with aqualungs, weighted belts and flippers or—as in the case of Miss Fernandez—with the laudable efforts at assistance on the part of Bjorgsen, Bert easily struggled ashore before any of the others got a nose or an eye out of water. He wasted no time, but sprinted for the vaulted beach archway, vanishing into its cavern while the rest were still recovering their strength and their wits.

Having finally disentangled herself from Oscar, Miss Fernandez battled the resurgent undertow's pull and waded in. Duggan and Bjorgsen followed.

"Where is he?" Oscar asked.

The three looked, with heavy breathing, at Bert's last known place of residence—the surf.

"Better see what we can do," Duggan said, starting to shed his paraphernalia.

Bjorgsen followed suit and they were on the point of taking a running plunge when Miss Fernandez called their attention to the footprints in the sand.

"That," she said, indicating the deep, sharp impacts in the smooth-washed shale, "is the direction in which he went."

## XIII

DAWN BY NOW was in full force, and Bert had what he felt to be the most incredible stroke of good luck. He had pounded at lung-bursting speed through the arched vault and on towards the parking lot of the motel. He had no thought beyond instant flight and an urge to put as much distance as he could between himself and the law until he could devise some scheme for a more permanent escape.

It was his intention to use the Jaguar, Ernest's car, which Bert had parked on his after-midnight return, and a spare ignition key which was always cached with a magnetized gadget under a fender. He had about reached it when a red Pontiac convertible flashed into the parking lot and headed for an open space alongside the Jaguar. To his confused amazement Bert

saw that Alice Spang was driving it and that Ernest, apparently out cold, was slumped beside her.

Inspirationally, Bert leaped. He pulled open the Pontiac's door, shoved Alice along the seat and said: "We've got to get Ernest out of here fast or he's a cooked goose. I've been looking for the kid all night."

"In," Alice asked, with the pent-up irritability of a hideous night, "a pair of wet swim trunks?"

"Don't get smart," Bert snarled and shot the Pontiac into reverse. Then he headed for the entrance and gave her the gun with a lurch that almost caused him to sideswipe the Lincoln coupe of the Cardigan bags who were foggily rolling home after having put the Club Sans Souci to bed.

A word about the Cardigan bags. They were twin sisters of mutually uncertain age from Akron, Ohio, where their parents had died and left them in the unappetizing role of spinsterhood but also heiresses to some tons of well invested pelf derived from the manufacture of tires. Both being alcoholics, in a nice genteel way, they lived in a steamy haze of liquid fun, retaining just enough coordination to permit them to drive their car from oasis to oasis without committing suicide.

It explains why, when they talked with Duggan a few minutes after their brush with the Pontiac, their account of the incident had the dubious cohesion and vague edges of a tired blanc mange.

It was, they told him in counterpoint, a miracle that they had escaped with their lives. Bert Jackson who was driving, and whom they recognized, had shot towards them like a madman and with him, looking frightened, was Alice Spang and on her other side, looking dead, was Ernest Dean.

"Was this car," Duggan asked a twin, "a black convertible Cadillac with a lemon top?"

"We didn't notice," the twin said.

"We didn't care," the other twin said.

"We had no time for lemon tops."

"And anyhow, whatever it was it was down."

"The top?" Duggan asked.

"It must have been, because the three of them were all sticking out in the open."

"Like three leaves. That's the way they went by us. Like three flutted leaves in a great big terrible gale."

This was good enough for Duggan, even the "flutted," whatever that stood for in the dictionary of dipsos. It was a wonder what with the alcoholic scud through which at the moment they were enjoying life

that they had been able to differentiate between a convertible and an armored tank. It puzzled him briefly that the general alarm had not been effective and the Caddy picked up, but he put it down to the darkness and that the emphasis of search had lain around Palm Beach and, presumably, to the north. Now that daylight was on hand he felt satisfied that some cruiser would spot and stop the car.

But would Bert stop?

Duggan grew cold at the realization that of course Bert wouldn't. He felt reasonably certain that Bert wasn't armed, hadn't paused to gather up some weapon, but the car itself was a weapon with the deadly power of a fatal crash during a chase.

He hurried to the nearest telephone, which was in the manager's quarters, and worked himself into a sweat amending the general alarm to the effect that the people in the black Cadillac convertible with the lemon top now numbered three, that the man at the wheel was a killer in the process both of escaping and in abducting the other two occupants.

There was almost no traffic and Bert made good time, crossing the intracoastal waterways bridge at Dania, then charting his course towards a cypress swamp in Collier County as hard as he could shove it. He knew of a hunting shack in one of the savannahs, having once visited it with Ernest and one of Ernest's native bar buddies. It was a dream spot for any angle you could think of. Plenty of sink holes to swallow things up.

There was dough in Ernest, dead or alive. Contact the family lawyer—Bert had met him several times at the Deans—and arrange a foolproof drop for the ransom. Then Mexico, Brazil, Timbucktu—who cares. And the girl—she could be used to keep Dean in line. Make a corkscrew out of her arms and Dean would be begging him to accept the dough. A laugh.

Swamp country. Muck, and the fungus-like rotting smell of water. They said that the turkey buzzards pecked your eyes out first.

His stomach contracted into knots as he spotted a highway patrol car up ahead, drawn up lazy on the shoulder at an intersection. He glanced at Alice, pale and stringy and frightened and his voice had the threat of a gun at her head.

"Quit figuring, sister. One move, one yelp out of you as we pass them, and you'll be deader than most. Just sit still and play it cool."

He slowed circumspectly and sweated with relief when the patrol car's two uniformed occupants gave the Pontiac little

more than a cursory glance. He figured time. The Cardigan bags had spotted his takeoff and even though they were constantly potted he could tell that they had recognized him. It was a cinch that Duggan would shoot out a general alarm.

Bert looked at the car's radio. It had no band for police calls but the regular channels surely would be carrying an account of the choke job by now—maybe even on-the-spot-stuff from the motel. The Dean name was newsworthy enough for it.

He tuned in and caught the close of a Miami newscast: "—barely missing a Lincoln coupe driven by Miss Evelyn Cardigan who was returning from a night club with her twin sister, Miss Lily Cardigan. The sisters are from Akron, Ohio, and are the heiresses to Fleetwood Tire. Although slightly suffering from shock they granted an interview, and here is a tape recording of their description of the getaway car:

Did you get a good look at the occupants, Miss Cardigan?

Perfect. Positively perfect.

After all, they were almost dumped into our laps.

No, Lily, we were almost dumped into theirs.

Did you identify the make of the car?

Absolutely. We gave a detailed description of it to Chief Duggan.

What make was it, Miss Cardigan?

A Cadillac convertible. Black with white walled tires. And a lemon top.

Did you get the license number, Miss Cardigan?

We didn't. We felt too faint.

The Misses Cardigan succumbed to shock again at this point and the interview closed. We will bring you constant bulletins throughout the day as they come in and now, after a brief pause, the weather."

Bert clicked off the switch. He said: "Brother, what a break! Those two dipsos are steamed up to the gills."

"They always are," Alice said.

"Black Caddy! Lemon top! It's a wonder they didn't dream up six lizards in green pants."

He was filled with a terrific exultation and an almost drunken feeling of absolute security. He was getting the breaks and all he had to do was to roll them to keep them coming his way. He felt good. Caesar good, all through. He wished he had a cigar.

"Bert—"

In his excess of warm comfortableness he said almost pleasantly: "Well?"

"The child— All the rest I could maybe understand—"

He snapped into ice.

"Cut the string section, sister. What about the kid? It was mine, wasn't it?"

A rush of wonder swept her, cool, and with the feel of mountain streams.

"Yours—and Miss Sangford's?"

"Miss Sangford in the pig's rear bumper. That tramp was Mrs. Bert Jackson before she took a nose dive into bigamy by becoming Mrs. Dean. Him—" Bert cast a contemptuous look at Ernest. "That night when we fixed it for her to hook him, Theda told me afterwards that he wasn't even able to kick off his shoes."

"Then there was no marriage, legally."

Bert blazed impatiently: "Why do you think I killed her? That nitwit brain of hers had it all figured down to a dime. First she figured I was holding out on the take, which I was. Then she figured on selling out. Big Payoff stuff, with me in the ashcan."

"She'd admit to bigamy?"

"She could play it a number of ways—all to her very rosy. And there was nothing I could do. So I did it." He looked at her with flat, killer eyes. "So be a good girl, Alice, or I'll belt you out into left field."

## XIV

THE SUN RODE higher and County Attorney Oswald Pinker finished packing his bag for a short week-end jaunt to Nassau as a guest of the Tommy Andersons aboard their diesel yacht *Carp II.*

Pinker was a magnetic, energetically agreeable man in his thirties with a first-rate legal mind and a courtroom manner that could have given Miss Fernandez's repertoire of histrionics a point or two to think about. He was well regarded both by the yacht club set and by his party's political machine as a smooth, brilliant cookie who was destined to go far.

His home near the county seat, which he occupied with his wife Celeste and their three children, was a handsome ranch style structure and could easily be expanded into a summer manse appropriate for a governorship.

The telephone rang and Pinker found Dr. Lawrence Ford, the county medical examiner, on the line.

"Thought you might want to know, Oz," Ford said. "Those two homicides in Halcyon are turning into pretty hot stuff."

"Homicides? Two? I thought it was a simple drowning."

"That's what it looked like at first, but Sibley says it's definitely murder. With a repeat last night, presumably by the same Joe, of a strangling."

"Look—take it easy, Larry. I just got up. Been packing for Nassau with the Andersons."

"Better unpack, Oz. This has

busted out into main line stuff—socialites, money, abduction—nationwide coverage. Sibley's given me a rundown for as far as he knows."

Ford relayed as much of the situation as he had gathered from Sibley. Reluctantly, Pinker cancelled the Nassau cruise and headed his car for Halcyon-by-the-Sea.

He found the motel, already filled to mid-season capacity, further overrun with the press, the wire services, radio and TV. He diplomatically ran this gauntlet and finally was closeted alone with Duggan in the unit that had been occupied by Theda Sangford, and in which Duggan had set up shop. Every other rental was splitting its seams.

They shook hands. Pinker wiped his brow. "Let's get on. Right now the job reads like a page from *'Through a Looking Glass'*—a floater that isn't, a matricide that isn't, an arrest that isn't, some rigmarole about a Gettler test busting the case wide open. Just what *is* a Gettler test?"

"Basically it's used to prove drowning."

"But we knew that. That the Sangford woman was drowned."

"Sure, but we didn't know how. Or where."

"Where? Sort of silly, isn't it? To section off the Atlantic Ocean—X marks the wave?"

Duggan smiled back. "That isn't the angle. The real value of the Gettler test is that it can show whether the drowning took place in fresh water or in salt."

Pinker was immediately interested. Here was something he could use, really sink his teeth into and dramatically present before a jury, like the cornucopia trick with the colored silks.

"Tell me," he said, "exactly how."

"Well, let's take the heart. There's two of them, two sides, really. The left and the right. When a guy drowns he inhales water and this water is absorbed into the blood of the pulmonary veins and finally reaches the *left* heart."

"I get the emphasis."

"Now, if the drowning takes place in fresh water the left heart's blood contains less sodium chloride than the right."

"Sodium chloride, if I remember my primer, being plain, common salt."

"Just about, but try and catch an M.D. admitting it. Then on the other hand, if the drowning took place in sea water the left heart would contain a much higher saline content than the right. That's what the Gettler test is based on. The discovery that in most cases of drowning the sodium chloride content of the blood of the left and right chambers of the heart is different."

"I see where you're heading. But look here, take that swimming pool out there. That's fresh water, certainly as far as a jury's notion is concerned, and yet it's purified by chlorination. The defense is bound to latch onto that angle and make a field day of it. Doesn't it throw the test out of the window?"

"No. By state specification the chlorine content of swimming pools must be kept down within minus point four and minus point six percent. Sibley adjusted for that in his analysis. Sangford was drowned in fresh water, but not in a fresh water chlorinated pool. She was drowned in that bathtub right inside there."

"Apart from the Gettler test, got any evidence?"

"Plenty. The minute I saw the body I knew the setup was wrong. You see, I've been a lifeguard. I'm familiar with floaters. There was the way her body lay, and the pattern of sand that had dried on her skin."

"Sand patterns — interesting. I'll use it. What was unique about them?"

Duggan, from papers on the desk, selected two photographs that Roth had taken. He handed them to Pinker.

"Take a look." Pinker studied the shots intently. "I'd say she'd first been dumped down flat, then arranged on her side. If she'd been washed ashore she'd have been more bundled, and the tide would have cleaned off the sand."

"That's exactly what's unique about the patterns. There shouldn't be any. Then her hair. There was no bathing cap."

"But don't they thrash around? Couldn't she have yanked it off herself while drowning? I'm simply exploring the defense again, Duggan. We know she never wore one. Not in a tub. What about the hair?"

"Some of it had streaked over her face and I brushed it back. Near the scalp it was not only damp but soft damp, fresh water damp, not sticky."

"That's a pretty fine distinction, isn't it?"

"Very. Not a guy in a hundred would notice it, and it will get you nowhere as evidence. But the hair oil will."

"Yes, it's good—salt water would wash the oil off with any sort of submersion, but not a short ducking under fresh."

"Then there are the bruise marks on her ankles, when he yanked her up by the feet to pull her head under."

"Do you know something? It's like that famous old case in England when bathtubs were still a novelty. Was it England or here?"

"I remember the one you mean. The guy married a bunch of wives, caught their heels while they took a bath, yanked

up and their heads went under. And right away he was once more a rich widower. Simple as pie. Only Jackson elaborated. He dumped the body by the sea shortly before proposed Suspect Number One—young Dean—was due to trot down to the beach for a daybreak rendezvous."

"Slow up a bit. I'm puzzled about how come Miss Sangford would lie quietly, and I might add fully exposed, in a tub of water and let Jackson wander in without her yelping?"

"No trouble there. They were married. About a year before she bought herself a bigamy charge by marrying Dean. I got that from New York when they put Sangford's record through the mill."

"Then that's where the motive lies—bigamy. That kid she was going to have figures too, wouldn't you say?"

"Sure to be along those lines. I think she was dealing him out. We'll dig it out of him. Incidentally, she took a bath about four in the morning. Perhaps because she was expecting Jackson. We know she was expecting him."

"How?"

"She had Jimmy, the bartender, drop off a couple of bottles of Scotch after the bar closed. Jackson's fingerprints are on one of them."

Pinker was enchanted. "That nails it. That nails him smack on the scene of the crime. Wonder why he was careless? Didn't wipe off things in here he'd touched?"

"He was conceited enough to be positive this never would be considered the scene of the crime. He'd have made book that the ocean would be officially accepted as the spot."

Pinker mulled for a moment such evidence as there was at hand, digesting it, dovetailing it with the more general picture he had been given by Hart.

"Tell me," he said, "what put you on to him? Almost everything pointed towards Dean, or his mother—or even the Spangs."

"His lies, and the fact that he held the key position in the whole setup."

"Amazing, isn't it, how even the smartest of them will lie and expect to get away with it?"

"They get cocky, and then Jackson knew we had no reason to suspect him. When I first questioned him about the Sangford deal, that is."

"What did he lie about?"

"Telling about the couple of months while he acted as payoff man for Dean to keep the marriage under the hatch. Claimed he knew nothing about her. He said she always contacted him by phone at the Deans and arranged a time and meeting place. Well, first it seemed

funny to me he hadn't tailed her, then when her record came through from New York listing her as a probable call girl, from a small book of men's numbers by the phone in her apartment—"

"Of course. You checked the telephone directory."

"Our local operator had one for Manhattan and she looked it up. Theda Sangford was listed all right and that, in my book, laid Jackson wide open. The rest was simple arithmetic."

"What a complete louse. Think of it, Duggan. His own wife for bait. About the strangling—I suppose Mrs. Dean got on to something, or else Jackson thought she had."

"He knew she was waiting. Her patience was out of character." Duggan became succinct. He was increasingly worried as to why the general alarm didn't show results.

He said tersely: "Jackson knew that a woman like her would have blasted him the minute she found out he'd two-timed her about the secret marriage. Unless she was getting wise to a hotter revenge—like his being the killer. Actually, Mrs. Spang was told by Mrs. Dean that Mrs. Dean 'knew something.' The word spread and naturally Jackson got it. To him, it fitted. Same setup with Fernandez."

"You planted that, of course."

"Sure, just as Day's pretending to fall asleep was a plant to make Jackson feel he had a clear field. Those things will be answered when we nab him—along with odds and ends like a funnel, rubber gloves, how he missed finding the Dean marriage certificate, et cetera. Right now I'm worried—bad."

"About Dean and Miss Spang? So am I. I suppose the only answer why they haven't been spotted is that they've holed in."

"No, I've been thinking. There's another answer. Mario."

Duggan put through a call for the Club Continental, and a harsh male voice barked: "Yes?"

"I'm Duggan. Police chief, Halcyon. I want to speak with Mario."

"You can't. He's asleep. He never gets up before three in the afternoon."

"Wake him."

"Are you kidding?"

"You heard me."

"It's a tough job, Chief."

"Do it."

"Well, if you say so."

Shortly Mario's rich voice said frowsily: "It is I, Mario. Why do you do this bad thing to me, Duggan?"

"Why did you lie to me?"

Mario's voice was complacent. "Ah—my little fib."

"Your little fib may result in killing Dean and Miss Spang."

"Do not joke with me while I am sleeping."

"Get this, Mario. Dean and Alice Spang have been kidnapped by Jackson."

"That is so terrible? A watchdog gathers up his sheep? For that I am woke up at—" Mario's voice plunged into horror, "—*mama mio,* it is but eleven o'clock!"

"For God's sake snap out of it. Jackson's no watchdog. He's a killer. He's *the* killer. Does that sink in?"

Mario's voice sharped to complete seriousness. "Yes, and at once I will tell you. If anything should happen to those two nice, rich kids because of me I would kill myself."

"That, I doubt."

"No matter. It is a noble thought. When Mr. Dean comes to my office at ten o'clock last night he cashes this check for one thousand dollars. But it is not for the cages or the wheel. He has arranged a plan during the daytime in secret with Miss Spang. They are to elope. They are to drive to Georgia where you can get married simply by opening your mouth—Duggan, why are they not now in Georgia?"

"I don't know. Get back on line."

"It is true as I told you last night that I loaned him a car, but it was not one of the Cadillacs."

"Why did you say it was?"

"I didn't. You did. It was a thing you took for granted. Me, I simply played along. Remember?"

Duggan remembered. "But why?" he asked.

"So that Mr. Dean would not be disturbed on his honeymoon. It would have been indelicate to let him be hauled back by cops for the foolish reason that his mother got herself justifiably killed. I am a sentimental man."

"Mr. Shylock was, too. What car did Dean take?"

"I told Slick to give him any car he wanted, and he took Slick's."

"What make?"

"It is a Pontiac convertible. Very red, which is why it possibly appealed to Mr. Dean for the happy occasion. Most festive."

"Don't crowd it. What year? License number?"

"You will relax while I find out such things from Slick. He is by my side. It is he who risked his life to wake me up. He is certain to know."

After a muttered off the line conversation Mario's voice returned and gave Duggan the data he wanted. Duggan thanked him, jotted the license number on a pad, and hung up.

"Wrong car?" Pinker asked.

"Wrong car."

"You'll change the alarm at once, of course."

"In part."

"Part? I take it, Duggan, that

our one-man-crime-wave Jackson is heading for a shock."

## XV

THE CANAL alongside the road was choked with suede green leaves and the purple of water hyacinth, while high in the shimmery heat over sage palmetto fans and the turpentine trees a buzzard lazed.

For mile after safe swift mile Bert, like spring, had been busting out all over with an almost drunken, arrogant sense of content. Boy, he told himself happily, you've got a rainbow 'round your shoulder. Along this sparsely traveled stretch which led to the cutoff through the savannah to the shack nothing could happen and the dangerous part of the job would be done. The initial flight.

Even along the more populated highways the luck had held. One road patrol car, one cruiser from the sheriff's office. A steady forty-per in passing them and all had been smooth. One thought had bothered: his being in swim trunks. But he was also, he remembered, in Florida where plenty of joes you saw in cars looked stripped.

And here along this desolate route he was satisfied, from frequent glancings in the rearview mirror, that he had no tail. Only that buzzard hanging in the sky. Only that yellow helicopter traipsing away like an old maid in long skirts far up above in the hot cloudless blue. From Bert casually thought, one of the fields in the general area.

A sputter brought his eyes sharply to the panel. The gas indicator stood at Empty. A towering rage swept him at his own lulled stupidity.

"When did you fill this crate last?" he snapped at Alice.

"We were going to, but we stopped at a roadhouse and Ernest—well, when we came out Ernest couldn't drive."

"I've been wondering why you turned back."

"I couldn't face it. Landing at that hour of the night someplace and—"

"Skip the blueprints." Bert threw a disgusted look at the wreck on her other side. "How a neat package like you could ever tie up with a ribbon-winner stewpot like him— It gets me."

"I love him. I love him very much."

Bert reserved his blistering reaction to this starched lace valentine as his rage vanished before visual proof that his luck was still hot. A piece ahead, just coming into eye reach, like a blessing stood what resembled a weather-tired, small general store. Two gas pumps were before its porch.

Bert coasted onto the shoulder. He sank into swift reflection. The distant store looked

lifeless and the car, he felt, would still have been unobserved.

"Stay put," he said to Alice.

He got out and opened the luggage compartment. Among its small litter of contents a length of towline and a wipe rag pleased him.

He said to Alice: "Get out."

"What are you going to do?"

He leaned loosely on the open door.

He said: "Do you play it my way, or do you get a tire iron shacked up in your head?"

Alice got out. Using the towline and the wipe rag he wrapped her up. He lifted her into the luggage compartment and slammed the lid. He fished the wallet from Ernest's hip pocket and was enchanted to find that it held, at a rough estimate, over eight or nine hundred bucks. Carrying it in his hand he walked towards the store.

It was farther away than it had seemed and his bare feet burned every step when they flattened on the blacktop. This, however, was a minor pest. The overall picture continued sound. He got to the store and hoped that somebody inside its dying shell would still be alive. He went into a twilight clutter.

"Anybody here?" he called.

A door opened in the room's rear and a bovine young woman, bulging in a play suit, came out of the shadows and inspected him.

"Been swimming, mister?"

"Many times, sugar ball, and let's cut the Abbott-and-Costello, shall we? I'm out of gas. Got a gallon can? I'll fill up when I bring it back."

"I'll go look and see. I think Job left one in the utility maybe a week or so ago. It's probably empty."

Minutes treacled through Bert's impatience in the fly-buzzing shade, and mosquitoes abroad from the surrounding swampland pulled their sneak attacks. Finally, after a good, endless quarter of an hour, the young woman returned.

"I got a can."

He said irritably: "That's peachy, ma'am. Just peachy. Let's fill it."

The can was filled. He gave her a five-dollar-bill.

"Hold it," he said, "until I come back."

He set off towards the car, and looked ahead and his stomach was gripped by inside hands almost twisting his guts out as he saw that a patrol car was parked by the Pontiac. His luck blew up in his head. He dropped the can of gas and tensed for an offside sprint into the palmettos.

"Don't try it, Jackson," a voice behind him said.

The sheriff's deputy was not only a big young man but his

right hand held what looked to Bert like a cannon.

"Just keep moving along the road," the deputy said.

Bert moved. He clutched after shredded lifebelts.

"You've got no call to jump me like this."

The deputy's voice was hard and exact. "You are under arrest for abduction and murder."

"You've got the wrong car. I heard the alarm. Black Caddy with a lemon top. Does that bus of mine—"

"Save it. You got the call Duggan had them keep sending on the regular broadcast channels. The general he put through on the police bands called for a red Pontiac convertible which is just what you've got. That firecracker blazed a trail two yards wide and we were just laying off until you stopped."

"I kept looking—"

"Sure you did. So did that helicopter up there. Two-ways radio communication, Jackson. Field glasses. They even spotted your storage job in the trunk."

## XVI

THE MIDDAY siesta-hour sun blazed hot down on Black's, and Miss Fernandez applied another pat of eau de cologne to Mrs. Spang's fevered brow. If only, if *only,* Mrs. Spang begged in silent prayer, they come back alive. Then everything, the whole great big beautiful world, would be peaches and cream.

She already had the major outlines for the wedding planned. St. Thomas's, of course, with a reception in the Waldorf-Astoria. Naturally there must be a wait, a decent interval between Mrs. Dean's shocking death and the divine event but the time would not be wasted. During it, Mrs. Spang planned to embrace dear Ernest within the same wise, gentle coils with which she had hogtied dear Alice. Yes, generously, self-sacrificially she would assume the tender leadership of the dear boy's dead mother. Always having his best interests at heart. And his dough.

"You're being awfully good to me," she said to Miss Fernandez. "To stand by like this during these terrible hours of anxiety."

"We are all children of God, Madame. Even the bad ones of us."

"You can't mean that literally. Not Bert Jackson."

"Even he."

Mrs. Spang was saved from replying to this outrageous nonsense by Duggan, who came in and said: "It's all right. I've just had word. Sheriff's patrol is bringing them in. All safe. All done."

Later, in a charming restaurant back of Hallandale, away

from people and places where they would be recognized, Miss Fernandez entertained Mrs. Spang and her daughter and a revived Ernest at dinner.

It was a pleasant meal, candlelit, and served on a screened balcony overlooking a garden lush with flora of the semi-tropics. One incident would always remain, Miss Fernandez knew, happy in her thoughts.

Mrs. Spang, during the baked pompano, said incisively to Ernest: "I've decided about two months would be proper."

"For what, Mrs. Spang?"

"To show respect for your dear mother. An elaborate wedding before then would be in bad taste. After it I thought we could take an extended tour. Possibly Brazil and the Argentine. You're not to worry about a thing, dear Ernest."

Ernest looked at her thoughtfully.

"I'm not, Mrs. Spang."

"As long as there is a breath left in me I shall try to make up for your loss."

"We appreciate that, Mrs. Spang. Both Alice and I. But I'm afraid there won't be too many opportunities."

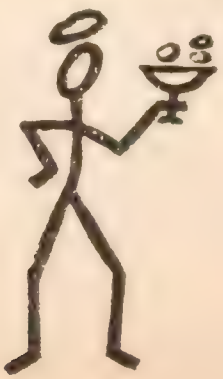
A chilly hand seemed to stroke Mrs. Spang's aging spine.

"Opportunities? I simply don't understand?"

"We will wait until the inquest and the funeral are over, Alice and I. Then we think a quiet church wedding, after which we're motoring west until the trial comes. We'll be planning where we care to live. Naturally, we'll arrange to have you settled wherever you may wish."

Miss Fernandez signaled their waiter to pour more champagne.

"I shall advance a toast." She raised her glass. She looked at Ernest with fond, relieved eyes and said: "Good friend—to your coming of age."



# it's against the law

*by . . . Erskine Caldwell*

**It may be against the law for a whittling ex-cotton picker to kill a man. But to Handy art took precedence over homicide!**

NOBODY KNEW where Handy came from, and nobody knew where he would go if he left. But if he had not killed Grandpa Price, he could have stayed another ten years or more.

Grandpa Price was old, and he was peevish, and he did nothing but fuss and find fault all day long. If he had been let alone, he would not have lived much longer, anyway.

But Handy hit Grandpa Price with a windlass, and the old man died that night. Handy had to pack up the little that belonged to him and get ready to go somewhere else to live.

"You ought to have had better sense," Harry Munford told him.

"It wasn't sense that had to do with it," Handy said.

"Just the same, it wasn't a good thing to do."

"A man oughtn't be an out-and-out trouble-maker," Handy said. "People who spend their lives making things don't have time to find fault with others."

"Even so," Harry said, "you

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*In a good many of Erskine Caldwell's short stories humor illuminates character to such a degree that "normalcy" in an ordinary sense breaks down and we find ourselves chuckling over the darkest of crimes. Yet there is goose-flesh aplenty in this strange, exciting, wonderful little mystery by the famed author of* TOBACCO ROAD. *For the privilege of reprinting it here we are greatly indebted to Little Brown & Co., and to Duell, Sloan and Pearce.*

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Originally published in "The New Republic" as HANDY
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shouldn't have done what you did to Grandpa Price."

A whole day could be spent counting up the downright trouble-making things Grandpa Price had said and done during the past ten or fifteen years. When he ran out of the ordinary things to find fault with, such as not enough gravy on the chicken or too much sweetening in the custard, he would go around quarreling about the time of day it happened to be.

Sometimes when it was morning, he would say it ought to be afternoon, and when it was noon, he would say it ought to be dawn, and then rant and rave if anybody said noon was as good as anything else for it to be. Only a few days before he died, he got after Harry because the chimney might not be in plumb. That made Harry so mad he almost lost his head.

"What if it ain't?" he shouted at the old man.

"Because if it ain't, it ought to be," Grandpa Price said.

Harry was so mad by then that he went for a plumb line and dropped it on the chimney. The chimney was only an eighth of an inch out of plumb.

"That ought to make you shut your mouth from now on!" Harry shouted at him.

"I won't shut my mouth, because the chimney is out of plumb and you know it. It ought to be torn down and built up again right," Grandpa Price said.

"Over my dead body," Harry told him.

Grandpa Price fussed about the chimney being out of plumb all the rest of the day and even through supper until he went to bed that night. He called Harry and all the Munfords lazy, good-for-nothing and slipshod. He followed Harry around the place saying anybody who would take up for an out-of-plumb chimney was not a good citizen.

"The more I think about it, Handy, the more I think you shouldn't have done it," Harry said. "Any number of times I've felt like picking up a brick or a crowbar and doing the thing myself, but a man can't go around the world hitting old men like that, no matter how provoked he is. The law's against it."

"I just couldn't stand it no longer, Mr. Harry," Handy said. "I'm sorry about it now, but it just couldn't be helped at the time."

Handy had lived there ten or twelve years. When he walked into the front yard for the first time, it was in the middle of the cotton-picking season. He came in and said he was looking for something to do. It was at a time when Harry needed cotton pickers if he ever needed them. Harry was all ready to hire Handy. He told Handy he

was paying sixty cents a hundred in the fields.

Handy shook his head as though he knew exactly what he wanted. Cotton picking was not it. "No sirree bob. I don't pick no cotton," Handy said.

"I haven't got any need for anybody else these days," Harry told him. "The cotton is falling on the ground, going to waste faster every day, and that's all I'm concerned about now."

"You always got need for something new, or something made of something old."

"What do you mean?"

"I make things," Handy said. "I just take what's thrown away and make it useful. Sometimes I like to make a good thing just because it's pretty, though."

He picked up a stick of wood about a foot long and two or three inches thick. Nobody paid much attention to what he was doing, and Harry was sizing him up to be a tramp. He asked Handy if he had ever worked in the fields, and Handy said he had not. He asked him if he had ever worked on the river steamers, and Handy said no. In the cotton mills. Not ever. Railroads. No.

Harry shook his head. He put Handy down a tramp. Handy scraped the wood with the knife blade and handed it to Harry. It was the smoothest-whittled wooden spoon anybody had ever seen. It looked as if it had been sandpapered and polished. It had taken Handy only the length of time he was standing there to do it. Harry turned the spoon over and over in his hands, felt of it, and smiled at Handy. Anybody who could do a thing like that deserved a better jack-knife than Handy had. Harry took his own out of his pocket and gave it to him.

Nobody said anything more to him about picking cotton in the fields. Handy walked around the yard looking at things for a while, and then he went around to the back of the house and looked inside the barn, the woodshed, the smokehouse and the chicken-run. He looked in all of the hen nests, and then he began carving nest-eggs out of some blocks of wood he found in the barn. They were smooth and brown, and the laying hens liked them better than any other kind.

After he had made six or eight nest-eggs, he found something else to do. He never asked Harry or anybody if it was all right for him to do a thing, or if they wanted something made; he just went ahead and made whatever he felt like doing. The chairs Handy made were the most comfortable in the house, the plow-stocks were the strongest on the farm, and the weathervanes were the prettiest in the country.

"The trouble with Grandpa Price, he wasn't like me and you,

Handy," Harry said. "The reason me and you are alike is that I crave to get things growing in the fields and you to make things with your hands. Grandpa Price didn't have the feeling in him. All he wanted was to find fault with what other people grow or make."

Handy was sad and dejected. He knew it would take him a long time to find another place where the people would let him stay and make things. He would be able to stop along the road now and then, of course, and make a chicken coop for somebody or build a pigpen. But as soon as he finished it, they would give him a leftover meal or a pair of old pants and tell him to go on away.

He knew all about the trouble he was going to have finding somebody who would let him stay and just make things. Some of them would offer him a job in the fields, or working on a river steamer.

"I want to make things out of pieces of wood," Handy said. "I want to build things with my fingers."

The people were going to back away from him; they would shut the door in his face. He could not sit still. His hands began to tremble.

"What's the matter, Handy?" Harry asked him. "What makes you shake like that? Don't let what happened to Grandpa Price untie you."

"It's not that. It's something else."

"What else?"

"I'm going to find it hard not having a place to live where I can make things."

"I hate like everything to see you go," Harry said. "Somehow or other it don't seem right at all." It hurt him so much to think about Handy's leaving that he tried not to look at him. "But," he said, "the sheriff will make it hard for me if I fail to tell him what happened."

It was already the day after Grandpa Price died, and the sheriff had to be told about it before Grandpa Price could be buried in the cemetery.

"But I don't want to do it, just the same," Harry said sadly. "It means driving you off, and I'd drive you off a dozen times before I'd let the sheriff find you here when he comes."

It hurt Harry so much to think about it he could not sit there and look at Handy. He got up and walked away by himself.

When he came back, Handy was not there. But presently he saw Handy's head bobbing up and down behind the barn fence, and he was relieved. After a while he went into the house to change into clean overalls and shirt. He had to change before he could go into town, anyway. There was nothing to stop him

from taking as much time as he wanted, though.

He looked at two or three pairs of overalls before deciding which to put on. He liked to have a person like Handy around, because Handy was always making something, or getting ready to make something. That was what he liked about Handy. He was like the children when they came home from school, or on holidays. They were busy at something, play or work, every minute they were awake. He was afraid, though, that when they grew up they would get to be like Grandpa Price, that they would spend their time finding fault instead of making things.

When Harry finally came out into the yard, it was late in the afternoon.

"I don't like to go to town at this time of day," he said, looking toward the barn where Handy was, up at the sky, and back again toward the barn. "It would mean coming back long after dark."

Harry walked around the house, to the garden several times, and finally toward the barnyard. He wondered more and more all the time what Handy was spending so much time down there for. Several times he had seen Handy come to the barn door, throw some trash and shavings outside, and then disappear again.

It grew dark soon, and he did not see Handy again until the next morning. Handy was at the table eating breakfast when Harry came in and sat down.

"What's this?" Harry asked, standing up again suddenly.

"A little present for Grandpa Price," Handy said.

"But Grandpa Price is dead. He—"

"I only made it to hang around his neck in the grave," Handy said. "I wanted to make something for him, but I thought he'd find so much fault with it if he was alive that I went ahead and made it all wrong just to please him."

It was a wooden chain about two feet long, each link about the size of a fingernail, and each one a different object. Handy had carved it from the beginning to end since the afternoon before, sitting up all night to finish it.

"If Grandpa Price was alive, he'd be so tickled to get it he wouldn't want to find any fault with it, Handy. As it is, I don't know that I've ever seen a finer-looking present."

Harry sat down and picked up the chain to look at it more closely. The first link he looked at was a miniature chair with three legs shorter than the fourth one.

"I didn't think anybody but me remembered about that time when Grandpa Price quarreled

so much about one of the chairs having one leg shorter than the others. I said one leg was shorter. Grandpa Price said three were short and one was long. Up to that time, that was about the biggest quarrel me and him ever had, wasn't it, Handy?"

Handy nodded.

Harry bent over to see what some of the other objects were. One was carved to look like a piece of the sky with the sun and stars shining at the same time. Another was a picture in a frame that looked upside down no matter which way it was turned.

Handy pushed back his chair and got up.

"This is too fine a thing to put in a grave, Handy," Harry said. "It would be a sin to bury a thing like this in the ground where nobody could ever see it again."

"I made it for a present to hang around Grandpa Price's neck," Handy said. "That's why I made it."

"Well," Harry said, shaking his head, "that being the case—I guess you've got the right to say. But it does seem a shame—"

Handy went out through the kitchen, down the steps, and across the yard to the barn. As soon as he got inside the barn door, he fired the shotgun.

Harry jumped to his feet, carrying the chain for Grandpa Price's neck with him.

"What did Handy shoot for?" he said. Then he went down to the barn.

When he came back, he was slow about it. He looked sad, but there was another look on his face at the same time. One moment he appeared as if he might cry; the next moment it was as though he felt so good he had to grin about it.

"Handy won't have to go now, after all." He grinned all over his face. "If Handy had stayed alive, I'd never have seen him again," he said to himself.

He walked up on the porch and began looking at the chain again, picking out a link here and a link there to stare at it and feel with his fingers.

"Grandpa Price can be buried in the cemetery if he wants to," he said aloud, "but Handy is going to be buried right here in the backyard."

He felt the chain with all the fingers of both hands and held it up to gaze at in the sunlight.

"I want to have him around," he said.

# dig it, brother

*by . . . Sam S. Taylor*

**A murder in ancient Egypt would have been hard to detect, with mummification a hallowed art. But even today Egypt casts a shadow.**

JOE VOSNIK leaned against the handle of his spade, staring reflectively into the hole he had dug. The outline loomed rectangular in the dawning light that sifted through the nearby willows. This was the second morning in a row that he had paused to rest his chin on the wooden handle and glance fixedly into the opening he had just completed.

Not that it differed from the hundreds of others he had dug through the years. The dirt was piled neatly on one side, ready to be replaced later in the day. The corners were expertly squared. The size was the usual. Somewhat more than three feet wide, six feet in length, and six in depth.

Other times he'd just gathered his tools, piled them into the back of his small pick-up truck, and driven out through the tall iron-grilled gates. But not this morning. Not yesterday morning. A succession of brooding thoughts were sliding down the

*It is certainly unjust that the slightest obloquy should be attached to the honorable profession of grave-digging. It might even be said that its practitioners have enhanced the glory of English letters, for without their aid how could Hamlet have improvised his immortal soliloquy? But Sam S. Taylor, with such mystery novel triumphs to his credit as* SO COLD MY BED *and* SLEEP NO MORE *(Dutton) seems not to care. He has slandered grave-diggers again in a brand new story, but with such a powder-keg quality of suspense we have to forgive him.*

line of his intent stare. This, too, was unusual for Joe.

An extensive assortment of Ridge City's notables who in their strutting moments on earth neither knew nor would have bothered to notice Joe Vosnik, had had their final resting places prepared by him. Yet the irony of the situation never occurred to him. Like his habits in general, Joe's thinking was of a simple pragmatic nature.

A grave was an impersonal thing. Like laying bricks, or straightening fenders, or anything else that meant so much per hour. Eighteen years ago he'd gotten a job with Forest View Cemetery. It was piece work, but Joe soon learned one impressive fact. Despite the vagaries of economic life elsewhere, there was never a falling off in production within the walls of Forest View. Having a sense of thrift that matched his muscles in development, that suited him fine. Joe made an honest uneventful career of digging graves.

But now he stood there in moody contemplation of his work. Although the racing montage of memory pictures crowded his head, a vague intuition of why he was staring with such fascination into that pit came through to him. He was thinking about that Saturday evening at Sharkey's Place.

But mostly he was thinking about Helen . . .

"Here's mud in your eye, sweetheart." The rather plumpish little blonde held up the one-ounce glass. Then she tilted her head and the amber liquid disappeared in a deft gulp. That made it three gulps for the evening.

*Sweetheart.* The word burned a warmer groove than the stuff in Joe's glass. Joe was floating. This ascent into rarefied atmosphere had started three weeks ago when the new girl at Andy's Diner had asked him to give her a lift home after her shift. Things happened fast after that. Surprisingly fast for one who had been emotionally involved with the opposite sex as rarely as himself. A long time ago he had discovered that women didn't exactly rush into his arms when they learned the nature of his vocation.

It was his work, in fact, that accounted for the one tender spot in his otherwise stolid unobtrusive make-up. Joe Vosnik was sensitive to the gibes to which a grave digger naturally falls heir. Particularly he resented the harpooning gags of that loudmouth hosiery salesman, Art Gilroy, who never failed to direct one at Joe whenever they met in a public place. At the Legion meetings, at Hodiak's bar Saturday nights, at those rare social events he attended.

Take that charity dance last summer. He'd blossomed out in

a new sports jacket for the occasion. Midway in the evening Art Gilroy had barged over to the table where Joe sat drinking beer with the attractive widow he'd invited to the affair. Art felt the lapel of the jacket like a connoisseur, then raised an appraising brow.

"Sharp coat you got there, Joe. What did you do . . . rob one of those stiffs you dug a grave for last week?"

He remembered the flash of abhorrence that showed in the eyes of the young woman. That was his last date with her. Roaring anger had bulged inside of him, but he managed to contain it just as he had on all those previous occasions.

There wasn't a vestige of physical fear in his restraint. A feeling of security stemming from years of steady work at Forest View had imbedded itself in Joe, exceeding even his resentment for Gilroy. Thus, there was logic to his enforced display of patience. Gilroy's sister had married rich old Foster Yates, chairman of the cemetery's board of directors. No point in risking being fired just to square accounts with Art.

All of which accounted for his being seated in one of the booths opposite Helen, in Sharkey's Place this Saturday evening. Sharkey's was out on the state road, sixteen miles from Ridge City. There wasn't a Chinaman's chance Gilroy would wander this far away from his usual nocturnal haunts in town.

A hairy paw slid across the table, finding her fingers. "I sure like you, Helen. I sure do."

"You're for me, too, daddy."

Her accompanying look might have impressed a worldlier man as being something less than spiritual, but for Joe it had the uplifting quality of a Gregorian chant. A great realization had descended upon him lately, and its impact had put in motion streams long quiescent. Joe Vosnik's was a lonely existence. Lonely as one of his excavations out at Forest View.

That he was not entirely unaware of this fact was evident in the accumulation in his rented room above Doc Greer's garage, of pictures and plans clipped from the home-building sections of the Sunday papers. There was also that unfailingly increased balance in his savings account. Subconsciously, at least, he was building for the day when that void might be filled.

And now the answer to that void sat across the table from Joe, her fingers interlaced with his. A long sigh started way down in his shoes. As if in anticipation of what he was struggling to say, a dreamy number drifted over from the juke-box.

"Helen, I been thinking."

"Yes, daddy."

"Well, you know. We seem to

hit it off pretty good, you and me."

"Sure, Joe." Her pressure was reassuring.

"Well, I got some money saved. Enough for you and—" The rest of it was nipped off by a vigorous slap on the back.

"If it isn't the old pick-and-shovel man himself." A hand extended in greeting showed above the table.

The familiar voice slashed across his heart before Joe glanced up at its owner. Tight-lipped, he managed to drag up his own hand.

Helen said gaily, "Say, I know you. You're Art Gilroy. What's the matter, don't you remember me?"

The lean younger man's attention shifted to the blonde. "Sure. The Hill Hotel, up in Brawleyville. You used to handle the cigar counter. Right honey?"

"Right you are." She frowned coyly at her escort. "S'okay if we invite Art to have a drink with us?" Remonstrance started to assume shape on Joe's lips. The blonde patted his hand. "Oh, c'mon, daddy. Art's quite a gag-man. Just want to have a few laughs."

Gag-man. He winced at the word. The unwelcome guest had already slid into the booth before Joe finally nodded consent, then ordered another round of drinks. For a while the other two just made small talk, mostly about Brawleyville.

But the chill tentacles of apprehension were spreading inside of Joe. It worried him more that Art appeared to generally ignore him in the conversation. As though he were doing it with studied malice, waiting for a choice opening. Waiting until every nerve-end in Joe was a prodding needle.

Then the girl's hand found Joe's again. Gilroy noted the act wryly. "Say, you're not figuring on a merger with this guy, are you?"

There was a languorous smile. "Well, I've got an open mind."

Art lifted his almost empty glass. "Couldn't pick a better one, honey. One of these days he's apt to be the biggest uranium man in the country."

"Uranium?" The frown was edged with new-found interest.

"Sure. He opens up a new mine two or three times a week. Right, Joe?"

The needles were breaking through his skin now. All over him. A voice under his scalp seemed to say, *Now, Joe, Now. Hit him before he spills it. Then get her out of here.* The hand under the table clenched fiercely, but habit invoked its customary veto. The hand stayed there.

Helen said, "You never told me about your mining interests."

Art explained, "Well, you can't blame him for being closed-

mouthed. A lot of people in this town are just dying to get into one of his diggings. Yes, sir—just *dying.*"

Joe reached hastily for his highball, taking a quick gulp. It practically gagged him. The blonde's fingers worked his endearingly. She said, "Maybe Joe'll make a killing. Then he can quit his job as a construction engineer."

Gilroy blurted, almost dropping his glass, "*Construction* engineer?"

"Why, yes. Didn't you know?"

Hoarse penetrating laughter engulfed the man. At least three inches of him slid under the table. "Boy, that's the topper. That's the topper."

The girl's face showed puzzlement. "I don't get it."

Gilroy finally regained his breath. He assumed a paternal air. "Look, honey. I don't want to disillusion you, but this is the first time I ever heard that term applied to a grave digger."

"Grave digger!"

She said it as though someone had dropped a wet squid in her lap. Joe felt the quick recoil of her fingers. There was a sickness inside of him. Then a searing whiplash of anger. Both hands gripped the edge of the table, and for an instant he was on the verge of tossing it over. Then he saw what had gathered in the blonde's narrowed eyes, and he realized there was no longer any point in mopping up the place with Foster Yates' unendurable brother-in-law.

Three times the following week he tried to arrange a date with the girl. It was no dice. The third coolly polite excuse confirmed what he had sensed in her first one. There were never going to be any dates with Helen.

So Joe Vosnik leaned against his spade, and for the second morning in a row gazed reflectively into a grave he'd just dug. Concurrent with the broadening light beyond the eastern ridge, an awareness of what motivated his rapt stare into that pit began to grow on him.

Joe was on the verge of committing a crime, and the means of making it a perfect one were no more distant than the smell of freshly-turned earth. *What better place to dispose of a body than in a grave?* An occupied one, at that.

An exhilarating inner warmth fanned out as the wonderful simplicity of his inspiration now stood revealed in his consciousness. He gathered his implements, and tossed them into the rear of his pick-up truck. Then he drove to the entrance gates. Bolting them behind him, he resumed the forty-minute homeward trip.

There was no work call the next day, but he showed no impatience. Experience had taught him that the intervals between

jobs in his trade were never of more than brief duration. The next evening as he read the paper while eating at the new diner he was patronizing now, Joe sensed his opportunity would soon present itself. Very likely, over the week-end. Old lady Butterfield had finally run out of years. There was a two-column story of the eccentric and wealthy widow who fancied herself an international expert on Egyptian lore. Even Joe knew about the truckloads of ancient relics and paraphernalia she'd brought back to her mansion following her numerous trips to the land of the Pharaohs.

One thing was for sure. Unless that batty old dame had bought herself space under a pyramid, which wouldn't have surprised him in view of the legends that had built up around her, she was going to join her late husband out at Forest View. That would mean another job for Joe.

This time it wasn't the prospect of more gainful work that gave added piquancy to his beef stew.

Confirmation arrived the next morning. Fred Hinkle, ground boss at the cemetery telephoned that Hannah Butterfield's interment was set for Sunday. Grim though it was, Joe broke out his first smile in days as he replaced the phone handset. Even the timing was working out perfectly.

Art Gilroy could be depended upon to make his usual Saturday night round of the gin-mills. That meant he'd return to his hillside bachelor cottage during the small hours. Probably tanked, too. Of course, there was also the possibility that he might not return home alone. Joe was willing to take his chances. Not that he doubted they would break in his favor. An expanding confidence had taken root in Joe. The confidence of a man riding the tail-wind of a relentless emotion.

Shortly past midnight Saturday, Joe turned into the wooded lane on the outskirts of town that led to Art's hillside dwelling. Except for a patch or two of ochre light near the base of the hill, there were no signs of habitation until he passed the shadowed form of a house near the summit. He pulled ahead until the road curved, then parked his truck and hiked back to the little rustic affair where Art lived during the summer months.

The house itself was built above a garage at the road level. The door to the garage was up. The fact that it was unoccupied was no surprise to Joe. A little earlier he had taken the trouble to case the bars in town. A gate in an ivy-covered fence opened on a nearby flight of brick steps that snaked up to the living quarters. Unlatching it, Joe went through the gate, then sat down on one of the lower steps. He

knew he was much too early, but he preferred the waiting to the remotest possibility of a miscalculation.

It was only after two hours had elapsed that his steel-trussed assurance began to show signs of strain. Although he had already started the important preliminary work at Forest View earlier in the evening, there still remained the final phase. And the success of what he had painstakingly planned depended on his completing that work before daylight.

For the third time tonight he tensed at the vague sound of a motor at the bottom of the hill. This time it didn't fade. When the incipient glow of approaching headlights tinged the overhead foliage, Joe bounced to his feet, limbered his arms a few times, and then stepped quickly to the fence where he crouched close to one of the gate-posts.

In a few moments the road was a splash of hard light that soon right-angled into the nearby garage. A moment later the engine was switched off, and darkness took charge again. There came the slamming of a car door, shortly followed by the unhurried crunch of shoes on gravel. A single pair of shoes. Joe's acutely attuned hearing assured him of that crucial fact. He was all springs now.

The crunching stopped at the gate while fingers fumbled for the latch. Then the gate swung back toward Joe. His eyes thoroughly accustomed by now to the dark, he immediately recognized the lean figure that swayed slightly as it approached the steps. Before the man reached the first step, Joe's hurtling body crashed into his spine like a guided missile.

Both went to the ground. Despite the terrible agony Art Gilroy struggled fiercely to counteract the arm that had circled his throat from the rear. But even instinct was no match for the combination of hate and two decades devoted to wielding pick-axe and spade.

It may have taken three minutes—scarcely more. Joe looked down at the unmoving form, sucked in another gulp of cool night air, and then went back up the road for his truck. He made a U-turn and coasted to the gate without flicking on his lights. Seconds later he shoved Gilroy's body into the back of his truck, covered it with a tarpaulin and headed for Forest View.

It wasn't quite four when he unbolted the cemetery gates and drove through, continuing to a silhouette of recently piled earth. There wasn't a sliver of apprehension as Joe got out his tools. For years it had been his habit during the hot weather to do his heavy work before sun-up. The boys in the squad knew this. If they happened to stop and flash

their beam on him through the high grilled fence, recognition would soon be followed by a friendly greeting, or a wisecrack.

There was the semblance of an inner smile on his lips as he thought of the peculiar advantages his ill-regarded vocation was affording him. Beyond that he wasted no more time on contemplation. This was one job that had to be completed before the dawn sent out its first feelers.

He dropped into the rectangular pit, already excavated to a depth beyond four feet. There was still another four feet to go. He had never before dug a grave of such unusual dimensions. But never before had he had occasion to use a grave for strictly personal reasons.

Once his spade scarred the damp earth, he never paused for a breather until he had reached the desired depth. Then he pulled himself to the surface. Despite the cool air, he was saturated with perspiration. Only from necessity he rested a few brief moments.

Then he returned to the rear of the truck for the final phase of his shrewdly conceived retribution. Hauling the lifeless body to the edge of the grave, he fastened a rope-sling around it and lowered it to the bottom. The rope cut, he shoveled earth back into the hole until the corpse had been covered with more than a foot of it. For the capping touch he jumped in again and tamped the dirt down solidly.

When he stood again at the top, pale light was already edging the markers and mausoleums. It didn't matter now. It could be high noon as far as he was concerned. Joe Vosnik, the grave digger, was standing at the edge of another of the hundreds of mortuary pits he had dug. It was like all the others. Six feet deep, and somewhat more than three feet across, with neatly squared corners. All ready to receive the last remains of old lady Butterfield later in the day.

Joe looked down at five years of torment. It was all over now —over and done with. Gone, too, was his long-festering hate. A new feeling had replaced it. A quieter one, that was growing strangely satisfying. For Joe was no longer a common laborer. He was an artisan enjoying the pride of a job beautifully executed.

From the very outset there had been no witnesses. Nor was there a single soul who knew what Art Gilroy's cruel gibes had meant to him. It could be days before Art, who went off on numerous business trips, would be missed around town. Even if foul play were eventually suspected, there had to be a body.

That last thought produced a slow grin as he gazed into the grave. The empty grave.

Joe drove back to his garage

apartment. Instead of his usual coffee, he opened a quart bottle of ale. He brought the second quart over to his couch. Before the bottle was completely drained he had fallen into deep dreamless slumber.

The ringing telephone finally drilled a hole through the black wall of his unconsciousness. Eyes still unopened, he felt for and managed to find the instrument.

"Where in hell have you been?" It was Fred Hinkle, over at the cemetery, his voice harsh with reproach.

"Just dozin'," Joe informed him.

"*Dozing?* I've been trying to run you down for an hour."

Joe just yawned.

The other man continued. "I had another job for you. Old Hannah Butterfield's."

"Finished that one," Joe told him. "Early this morning."

"Yeah. That's what I thought, too. But her lawyer called me up the minute I got to the office. He just ran across some special burial instructions left by the Butterfield dame. That hole you dug just won't do at all, Joey boy."

Joe's eyes were wide open now —in utter startlement. "I don't get it."

"Well, you know. She was nuttier than a candy bar. She used to run around that big mansion of hers dressed up like the Queen of the Nile. Anyhow, she's all prepared to set up light housekeeping when she lands in the great hereafter. Just like the old Egyptians.

"Her lawyer told me they found a whole mess of items she left orders were to be buried with her. Canned food, a spare wardrobe . . . trinkets. All carefully packed in a couple of cases. Boy, I'll bet she even included an eight-day alarm clock." He remembered something. "Oh, yes —and there are those nine stuffed cats. Sacred cats, the old coot called them."

Joe ran his tongue over lips that had the feel of mummification. "You mean we have to dig another grave alongside?"

"That's right. She left implicit instructions. Everything goes in the same grave. In fact, her orders are that all the foodstuff is to be placed just above her coffin."

*Above.* He tried to regain the normal rhythm of his breathing. This was where the whole crazy dream should end. But the fearful question slipped out. "The stuffed cats. What about them?"

"That's why I tried to get you, Joe. They go underneath the old girl. All nine of them. That means we got to extend the depth another couple of feet, at least."

He was standing now, words and beating heart racing past his throat in a dead-heat. "I'll be right down. Right down."

"Naw. Relax. It would take you too long from where you live. Besides, everything's taken care of. When I couldn't reach you, I got hold of Tony Chavez. He's been out there digging for ten minutes already."

Hinkle's laughter crackled against his ear. "Just imagine! Going to heaven with a truckload of canned food and nine stuffed cats. Boy, that's the prize laugh of the year. Yessir. The prize laugh—"

Slowly, the way a very old man descends a flight of stairs, the hand gripping the phone piece came away from Joe's ear.

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*Among the Contributors to Next Month's* SAINT *will be*

LESLIE CHARTERIS,
*with* "The Lovelorn Sheik"

DOROTHY L. SAYERS,
*with* "A Case for Lord Peter Wimsey"

STEVE FISHER,
*with* "Cinderella Wore Black"

ISAAC ASIMOV,
*with* "Death of a Honey-Blonde"

DAVID DODGE,
*with* "Murder Is No Accident"

E. PHILLIPS OPPENHEIM,
*with* "Burglars Must Dine"

*and many others*

# my two uncles in luzon

*by . . . Leonard J. Guardino*

**Singing in the rice fields may not be soothing to the nerves of a murderer. But oddly enough, it was the victim who suffered.**

YOU COME UPON a big, rich rice-field in the sunny Philippines and you know that only hard work could have made it look so successful. My Uncle Bey's rice-field was very large, but not successful. The reason? Seven men had agreed to work on my uncle's farm; but there was far more singing than labor.

These men were professional Filipino singers from Manila. They were not famous and had to work for a living between stage jobs. However, they once received a very heartening write-up in a Manila newspaper. Bogado, the short, barrel-chested leader of the troupe, was so proud of his reportorial clipping that he showed it to almost everyone he spoke to.

Now Uncle Bey would not have hired these men had he known that they were a singing group. But he needed all the farm labor he could get, and did his best to turn a deaf ear to their constant song-making. After a month of heroic effort his nerves gave way. Only his brother, Peter, did not mind it. Peter usually smiled in his cool, silent

*Despite the grimness of this unusual little yarn there's a rich humor in the appealing naivete of its remarkable characters—a kind of "I was there" quality. And that quality is not synthetic, for Leonard J. Guardino has a first-hand, G. I. Joe acquaintanceship with the Philippines, and a keen gift of irony.*

manner and watched his brother writhe.

Peter had a good reason to rejoice in Uncle Bey's sufferings. He was making plans to kill his brother—something he had wanted to do for a long time. He was determined to own the farm completely, not just the ten percent interest he already possessed. His plan was to throw suspicion on one of the singers. But up to now nothing perfect in the way of a murder plot had occurred to him. So he was forced to go on planning, and biding his time like a hungry garden spider."

Every evening after work the singing laborers congregated on the porch and made it a practice to lift up their voices very lustily. This seemed to happen just when Uncle Bey was enjoying a game of poker with his scheming younger brother.

"There they go again!" he exclaimed one night, throwing down his cards." You hear them? They're just like a bunch of sick dogs! Too much singing must be a sickness. It's the same way with a man who loves work—and works himself to death!"

Peter was a thin, quiet Filipino in his early thirties. "You take it too much to heart," he said. "Singing or not, they are helping you to bring in the harvest. You should be more grateful. You have cursed every one of them to their faces since they came here. Thus, for an honorable farmer, you have lost face needlessly."

Uncle Bey picked up the cards, and frowned. He was a short, wide-bellied man nearing forty. "Never mind that kind of talk," he mumbled. "I'm glad there are only two weeks of farm work left. When they go it will be very restful again."

"That you can be sure of!" Uncle Peter said strangely.

My Uncle Bey's brows lifted suspiciously. "What do you mean?"

Peter shrugged: "Those men hate you. You can see it in their eyes. Again and again you have insulted them by proclaiming that their ancestral forebears must have been howling wolves—or worse. I would not be surprised if one of them—or more—are planning to commit violence upon you before they leave."

Uncle Bey smiled hard at this. " 'He who speaks for minds that are not his, speaks only the truth of his own thinking.' " he said. "That is a wise Leytian proverb, my brother. Poker-faced as you are, I have seen an evil omen in your eyes. I am watching you closely."

Peter smiled faintly. "We are supposed to play poker. You deal."

Uncle Bey shook his head. "I cannot play cards with all that singing outside! I will show those whiners that they can't be that

disrespectful and continue to get paid for it!"

He marched to the porch angrily. The moon rode high in the sky and the singers kept gazing at its magic glow as they blended their manly voices in soft harmony. Most listeners would have been overjoyed. The choir was good. But Uncle Bey's idea of music was the crow of a cock on a blue early dawn or the low of a caribou under a shining sun.

My uncle interrupted them by yelling: "Stop that music! I have something to say to you!"

There was sudden, appalled stillness. "Good!" cried the harried farmer. "Now if you will all come inside I will pay you off! When you get your money there will be no more boarding at the barn. Instead, you will take to the road—singing to your heart's content. You are discharged!"

Uncle Peter emerged on the porch to lodge a protest. "You can't do this now" he said calmly. "There are two weeks left of harvesting. I'll lose out on my miserly interest!"

"Your share of the profits is so small I could have paid you off weeks ago, my brother! Please do not interfere in my business!"

"That's not the point, Bey! Much rice will be lost!"

"I don't care!"

Uncle Bey glared at the barrel-chested leader of the troupe. "Do you want your money or not?" he demanded.

"Sir," answered Bogado. "My men have nothing to lose if you fire us. But as a favor to you, we will forget your anger and stay. We realize that these last days of harvesting mean much to you."

Uncle Peter said: "He is right, Bey. You are losing your head. Don't lose these men, too!"

"I have made up my mind!" said the angry farmer stubbornly.

Bogado looked at Uncle Peter. "Thank you very much," he said. "We are loyal men—not the disreputable kind your brother makes us out to be. In fact, I have a newspaper clipping printed in our honor. It praises our characters and singing. Would you like to read it, sir?"

"You have tried to make me read it before." Uncle Peter smiled. "I am not interested in your characters. Only the work you can do here."

"And I'm not interested in your singing!" shouted Uncle Bey." If you promise not to sing anymore, you can stay!"

"We cannot stop what our hearts will us to do, sir!" pleaded Bogado. "It is like ceasing to breathe. We would rather take our salaries and leave."

My uncle paid them off quickly. About to depart with his men, Bogado said: "Your strange curses directed at our ancestors made us very miserable. As we have no malice, but only music in our souls, we wish you better luck. Goodbye, sir."

The men filed out of the house singing the American song called *Stout-Hearted Men.*

When their voices died out in the distance Uncle Peter looked at his brother and said: "You don't care. You're rich. But what about me?"

Uncle Bey shrugged. "You should enjoy the restful silence. It is more precious than gold. Loss or not, I am glad to hear no more singing. How about poker?"

Peter calmed down quickly. "Why not?" he frowned. "It is the only way I can make money around here. I'll deal the cards."

These were my two uncles—two different Filipinos with opposite personalities. One was a deceitful man, properly cool and polite—a man who carried the unseen germ of hate in his heart. The other was an excitable, old-fashioned farmer.

Had Uncle Bey employed women in the rice-field rather than men, he would have gotten more work out of them. But to him women were a disturbingly contrary race of personalities who frightened him by their resemblance to man. Thus it was not too surprising that he had never married. All he really cared about was his farm. He lived for tuba wine, money in the bank and his animals.

Peter had an exactly opposite point of view. He knew just how to make the farm prosper. With his brother's money he could hire all of the women he wanted—to do the hard work. They would not sing. They would only drudge. He had a low opinion of women, whereas his brother Bey became only disturbed by them.

Peter's philosophy was: 'Twenty women can equal the strength of one caribou. But no amount of women can equal one man!' He told this to Bey once.

The farmer had frowned and said, "I knew a woman once who had more brains than twenty men like you! My own mother!"

Ever since that time, Peter had never brought up the subject of women again.

The following day, the leader of the singing troupe woke up in a hotel room looking very thoughtful. He realized that he had made a mistake in giving up his struggle with Uncle Bey so easily. Booking engagements for their summer act in Manila would be many days in the coming and without the money earned at laboring the choir would have barely enough to subsist on. There were many costumes and sheet-music to purchase, and the outlook seemed bleak.

Bogado got out of bed and dressed. He had decided on a course of action. He would go back and speak to my uncle more sensibly about finishing up the harvesting chores. The extra money—and a possible small bonus—was desperately needed.

Perhaps the farmer would be in a better mood after realizing how short-handed he actually was.

Later in the afternoon, the hopeful troupe arrived at the farm. Uncle Bey came out of the house with a shotgun. "Get away from this farm!" he ordered. "I will not warn you a second time."

"Sir, we have come back to work, we promise not to sing until the harvest is over."

Uncle Bey put down the gun. "If you promise not to sing—even after the harvest—you may work for me again at the same wages. I am not a heartless man."

"All right, sir," said Bogado. "We will go to the field now."

The seven men went away.

Uncle Peter came out on the porch, his eyes shining. "So they have come back" he said. "You are very lucky."

"Maybe they mean it this time. I hope so."

"You won't hear any more singing," Uncle Peter said. "I can guarantee you that."

"What do you mean?"

"They need the money badly," Peter said, smiling. "They won't take a chance."

Uncle Bey gave his brother a searching look and went into the house.

That night, as the men lay sleeping in the barn, Uncle Peter entered to see that everything was in order. He had done this before and the singing laborers had become accustomed to it. One or two opened their eyes and went back to sleep. My uncle waited a moment and then picked up a pair of trousers that lay near one of the dormant men. Going through the pockets, he took out a big knife. He put down the trousers and left the barn quietly.

The following afternoon, Uncle Peter said to a tall, Chinese constable: "That's the man—there! I saw him kill my brother ten minutes ago!"

He was pointing at a thin, smiling Filipino—a member of the singing troupe. Bogado and his men stopped all work the instant the constable took out his revolver. He did not aim it at them, but merely fingered it and said: "All of you! Come into the house, please."

Two minutes later, many astonished eyes stared down at the body of my Uncle Bey. He was lying on his back on the floor, with a big knife protruding from his chest.

"All right, Peter," said the constable. "Tell me again how it all happened."

"I was in the barn tending a sick caribou," said my Uncle Peter. "I heard voices in the house, which is less than twenty feet away. The voices were arguing very angrily. I dropped everything and ran over to a window.

"This man—" Peter pointed to the same man he had singled out in the rice-field—"was telling my brother many disrespect-

ful things. Mainly about Bey having cursed his ancestors, and that he must do his work without the pleasure of singing. My brother got very excited and went for his shotgun. Before he could reach it, this man wilfully stabbed him in the chest and ran out.

"I went inside, and bent over my brother. He had died instantly. However, I had taken a good look at the murderer. To prevent him from escaping I knew I must report the tragedy to you quickly, constable."

The man of the law nodded. Then he asked the accused man: "Is that your knife?"

The Filipino inclined his head.

Bogado, their leader, had a much more incredulous expression on his strong face. "Constable," he begged. "May I speak to you in private?"

"You say it here!" said the constable, sternly lifting his revolver.

"I only want to show you this!" Bogado removed a newsclipping from his pocket. "It is important that you read it, sir!"

The constable took the clipping warily. Backing up a few feet he began to go over it in silence. Suddenly his brows went up. "Come here!" he said to the accused Filipino, who stepped forward immediately.

"Open your mouth!" he ordered.

The man did so. The constable stared inside. Then he nodded thoughtfully. "Close it," he said gently.

Bogado said to the constable. "I once begged this man to read that clipping. Many times, in fact. He always refused."

"What clipping?" asked Uncle Peter.

"This one—" the constable said and handed it to him.

My uncle took it and read aloud: *"Filipino singing troupe displays unusual talent. There is a team of singers who make beautiful music with only their voices —working or not working. They have played the best houses in Manila, but unfortunately are still unsigned most of the year.*

*"Bogado Dustez, baritone and leader of this sensational choir, does all the business managing. The actual leader, however, is Ibasco Magsay who conducts and arranges all of the songs for the group. Magsay is the only member who does not sing. The reason for this is a sad one. During the last war Magsay was captured by the Japs and they cut out his tongue—!"*

Uncle Peter turned pale all the way from his original native brown! He dropped the newspaper clipping and sat down on the floor looking very weak.

"So you see, Peter," said the constable. "You couldn't possibly have heard this mute man arguing with your brother! *Why did you do it?"*

"For the sole possession of this

farm," mumbled Uncle Peter. "That's why I did it. Bey was making it go to hell slowly."

Bogado, the spokesman, looked at his troupe. At a sign from each member in turn he raised his right arm. At the correct signal the men broke into a song, startling both the constable and the guilty man with a native tune beginning: "When the harvest moon is shining there is joy and pride in the walk of a man and justice for all."

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# that's arson, parson

*by . . . Leslie Charteris*

**Seduction and arson are not minor sins. But the Reverend Janssen's guilt was too black for distinctions to be drawn.**

SOME psychiatrists might tell you, after a study of the youth and antecedents of the Reverend Heie Janssen, that he was the kind of fellow destined from birth to get into trouble in a big way. Yet whatever significance these students of human behavior could have found in his teen-age antics or his actions after reaching maturity would scarcely warrant the suspicion that homicide would be the trapdoor through which the devil would eventually get him for keeps.

The Reverend Janssen's departure from the paths of righteousness and his subsequent descent into the way of the transgressor was notable chiefly because the lure with which Satan baited his hook was of a typically human variety, while the climax was so close to a perfect crime that the preacher's punishment might easily have been delayed to the hereafter.

In fact, the denouement resulted from a trifling bit of biological carelessness that might

*There are psychological duplicities in the best of men. But some individuals seem destined to tread a path of such appalling wickedness that it almost seems as if nature had turned maliciously willful in regard to them. Certainly childhood frustration and a wretched early environment do not fully explain the dark misdeeds of an arsonist who can self-righteously glorify himself. But in this amazing true fact crime story Leslie Charteris brings that enigma so sharply into focus that entertainment and insight blend in a most dramatic way.*

never have been discovered at all had not Heie erred outrageously a second time by violating a fundamental tenet of the dogma he professed and preached, namely, the Ninth Commandment. This, the devil may have thought, lent an amusing touch to an otherwise macabre situation.

For thirty wears the Reverend Janssen had preached about the dreadful tortures of Hell, shadow-boxed with the Evil One, and warned his congregations in passionate tones against the inevitable consequences of Sin. His favorite quotation, in Latin, was "F a c i l i s descensus averno," which he frequently contrived to inject somewhere in his sermons, then, pausing momentarily in his harangue to obtain the proper dramatic effect, bellowed an explanation for the unregenerate sinners who sat starry-eyed and gaping in reverent awe at his superior learning.

"Easy is the descent to Hell!" he would translate, while the brethren in the pews scuffed their feet, cleared their throats, and fearfully searched their cringing souls to discover if they were being coaxed by the desires of the flesh toward the skids of eternal damnation.

On the first Sunday of every month, Janssen preached on the mortal sin of lust, taking for his text the Tenth Commandment. This became as regular as the visit of a rent collector. Why he dwelt with such fervor and frequency on the subject and its relation to immortality, is one of the symptoms which might have interested a psychologist. Perhaps at heart he was a natural freethinker, the secret workings of his mind being skillfully camouflaged by the cloth. This might account for his endless references to the affinities of holy men with women of questionable morals, as related in the Bible. Yet he always managed to make such departures from orthodox righteousness appear to be in the service of the Lord and by no means for lay, if we may use the expression, sinners.

He justified this original philosophy by quoting the first verse of the second chapter of the Book of Joshua, in which it is recorded that the prophet, before attacking Jericho, sent out spies to case the town, and that "they went, and came into an harlot's house, named Rahab, and lodged there."

This digression from virtue by God's chosen people was ordered by the Almighty, he claimed, because the ancient bawdy house was a place where enemy officers hung out, so that it was there that military information might be obtained. Yet he never explained to his quivering congregation by what ruse or other strictly secular monkey business the boys got the inside track with

Rahab, as the Scripture says they did.

Thus Brother Janssen successfully kept Satan at bay, artfully tantalizing his flock with just enough hints of the beautiful exercises of sex to provide them with a soul-satisfying sock, at the same time holding out an exceedingly dim prospect of everlasting life for those who indulged in them.

He was a big raw-boned man with Teutonic features, grayish thinning hair, humorless and given to brooding introspection except when fired with religious inspiration in his pulpit. He was born in Germany in 1887, the son of a fairly properous merchant, and educated in Berlin and Zurich. He had been only seventeen when he talked his father into letting him set forth to survey the moral climate of the United States.

Always of a religious bent, he found effete New York City, bathed in sin and worldly beyond his imagination, not at all to his liking. Heading west with the few remaining dollars given to him by his father, he wound up in a theological seminary in Dubuque, Iowa, from which he eventually graduated with honors. A little later, on June 23rd, 1907, he was ordained in Chicago, where he was offered a church.

But big cities were not for Rev. Heie Janssen. The wickedness he observed on every side, and about which he quickly learned that there was nothing he could do to turn the damned away from their speedy and precipitous joyride to hell, caused him to writhe in sweat-soaked agony. So he hit the trail for the Northwest, where he had heard that there were countless little towns populated with simple-minded folks, steeped in religious tradition, and crying out for a prophet, such as Heie fancied himself, to lead them out of the wilderness and into the promised land.

In the years that followed, the Reverend Janssen devoted his tremendous physical energy and rabid fanaticism to saving souls and making it pay off to his own financial advantage as well as the spiritual profit of the errant sinners who were gullible enough to gamble on his promise to steer them safely away from the everlasting fires, if they entrusted all to his guidance.

The first charge he accepted was in Lincoln Valley, North Dakota, where he met and married Maud, the daughter of a local farmer. This appears to have been a somewhat precipitate choice, for not long afterwards his fancy turned toward her younger sister, with whom he entered upon a torrid affair which was unfortunately discovered by the church deacons. Be-

ing of less liberal persuasion than himself, the indignant elders invited him to resign, which he did forthwith, leaving them to find themselves another shepherd in 1915.

This minor setback, however, by no means discouraged him from his chosen career. He made a fresh start in March, Dawson county, Montana, where he battled with Satan with vigor for eighteen years. From there, in the spring of 1933, he returned to North Dakota, where he became pastor of the Evangelical Lutheran church in the bucolic little town of Krem.

It must be conceded that, on the whole, he had made good in the soul-saving business. His reputation, except for the extra-curricular romance with his sister-in-law, which even the garrulous biddies of Krem had somehow failed to get wind of, had spread throughout the Northwest, and he was often called to preach in the larger cities of Minneapolis, St. Paul, Fargo, and even as far away as Duluth.

This, of course, did anything but deflate his ego, and in time brought him to the point of wondering whether idyllic relationships with women other than his wife, who had borne him two sons, might not be a spiritual necessity for a man of his standing with the heavenly hosts. That he was muscling into the chair on the Lord's right hand and would eventually occupy it alone, becoming a sort of step-son, was a destiny that he does not seem to have doubted.

But now the time was swiftly approaching when Brother Janssen, who had often had trouble in controlling his concupiscent eye from roving in the direction of a voluptuous farm-wife, was entering the dangerous age of temporary glandular rejuvenation, finding himself suddenly harassed by the ambitious urges of the Indian Summer of his gonads, which never should have happened to a sanctified man of his years.

Having discarded, long since, any pretense of finding satisfaction in his nuptial bed, his long repressed desires presently turned him into a frustrated Casanova who began looking over the field in his parish for some affinity likely to provide him with a suitable release.

Let it be said to his small credit that in all the years during which he had cloaked himself in piety and expounded the gospel to the godly, he had never made passes at his choir singers or Sunday school teachers. This may have puzzled Satan, for such a temptation usually proves astonishingly successful when dangled before the sensuous gaze of a philandering cleric well schooled in the dangerous

art of playing on human emotions.

Yet this singular ascetic victory for the Reverend Janssen was entirely obliterated by the colossal blunder he now pulled when the Devil finally broke through his guard and landed a knock-out wallop flush on his fragile jaw.

One of the members of his congregation was Alma Kruckenberg, a pretty, well-rounded lass of twenty, who lived with her parents and nine brothers and sisters on a farm near Krem. Naive, as such rural girls sometimes are in spite of the traveling salesman legend, and untroubled by the wickedness of a changing and restless world, she had been singing in the choir and teaching a Sunday school class for three years when the Reverend Janssen first cast covetous eyes upon her and began to dream of the illicit bliss that might be theirs if he could convince her that his artfully disguised caresses were benedictions. Satan, lurking in the background, saw his opportunity at last, and moved in speedily to coach the old mountebank and prod him in the posterior with his trident if he faltered.

Heie, never doubting his ability to convince Alma that she could safely trust her soul to his ministrations and therefore her body to his whims, was temporarily stumped by the little problem of where to carry on this hungrily anticipated clandestine romance. He thought of the church, but this bothered him slightly for the singular reason that even at such a stage of the plot he considered it might be a desecration of a holy place. Now the Devil came up with another good idea.

Mrs. Janssen, who had been a semi-invalid for a number of years, was bed-ridden and needed hospitalization.

"Why don't you send her to Bismarck to the sanatorium and have Alma come and keep house for you?" Satan suggested.

Mr. Janssen thought he had a brilliant solution to his dilemma.

It required no effort at all to obtain the consent of the girls' parents to such an arrangement, and even Mrs. Janssen became an enthusiastic advocate of the plan, never dreaming in her suffering that he would proceed forthwith to besmirch the good name of himself and his family, not to mention an innocent virgin, immediately upon her departure.

A week before the ailing wife was to be taken away, Miss Kruckenberg arrived, bag and baggage, setting the stage for the first act of the drama that was to follow.

Having had one sad experience in cheating at the business of marriage, the Reverend Janssen moved cautiously at first

when he found himself alone in his house with Alma. With Heaven just around the corner he merely waited for the golden gates to be opened by some deft finagling with the lock, which he hadn't yet figured out. To be sure, it was somewhat confusing to find himself thus in the driver's seat. At first he didn't know just how to commence his conquest, except that it must be done in the name of the Almighty.

If Heie lacked in resourcefulness during these trying hours of indecision, Satan was at his best, impatient to have this newly acquired convert get to the business at hand.

"Tell her it is ordained by God that she is to become the mother of a new Saviour," the voice whispered in the preacher's ear.

For some inexplicable reason this disconcerting thought of the reproductive responsibility and consequences of what he was contemplating had never entered the Reverend Janssen's head before, and now it set him back on his heels momentarily. Eventually, as the consuming passion blazed more fiercely within him, he shrugged it off as something to worry about later, if at all. This major error in foresight was soon to upset his inadequate calculations and bring about his downfall.

One evening at dinner, after a long day of communion with his conscience in the church, Heie, who had practically convinced himself that his personal actions were above the reproach of mere men, opened up casually on Alma, letting her have some pellucid claptrap about the virtues of chastity, except in those rare cases where the Lord made special exceptions.

Resorting to all the sanctimonious cliches he had used through the years, and even cooking up some new ones, he blubbered like a mellifuous announcer in an over-long commercial. Alma, listening attentively and nodding dutifully at each bush-league blast about the benefits of a holy union, could hardly fail to get the idea that what the old roue was talking about had something to do with sex.

Sensing that his disciple was more than mildly interested, the Reverend Janssen now gave her the works. Quoting Scripture to support his blasphemous suggestion that she might easily take a place beside the Virgin Mary, in only a slightly less immaculate sense, he concluded his peroration with a short pause, and then rumbled: "Look into my eyes, my dear, and receive the Blessing of the Spirit."

Alma looked, blushed furiously, and her doom was sealed.

Within a fortnight, the girl was completely enslaved. Janssen meantime, having miraculously

shed the thwarted look that had haunted him for months, went about the work of the Lord with new zest. He made periodic visits to his wife in Bismarck, always returning to report improvement in her health in spite of the fact that the physicians held out little hope for her ultimate and complete recovery.

Secretly pleased with the prospect of freedom from a partner who had become somewhat less than enthusiastic about wedded bliss after she discovered that her saint also had horns under his tarnished halo, he continued the deceit behind the mask of piety and self-abnegation that earned the almost unanimous respect of his devoted flock.

But the Reverend Janssen's elation over his spiritual and physical resuscitation lasted only until the night that Alma told him she was pregnant.

After trying to console her with the reassuring thought that she must be mistaken, which he didn't believe himself, he sought solace in the privacy of his study, turning to God in his hour of trial for comfort and guidance. It didn't require long for Heie to discover that God, like nature, had played him a dirty trick, and had no practical remedy to recommend.

A divorce, against which he had always preached, but which he could easily have condoned in his own case, would not be so easily sold to his parishioners. If he sent the girl away until her travail was over, there would be talk. This would imperil his comfortable tenure of office. But she could not stay around too long before the wagging tongues of gossips would spread the truth. And he had no contacts through which to procure an abortion.

Of a sudden, the Reverend Janssen realized, as less hypocritical men have often done before him, that he was in one hell of a fix.

The next morning, when the erstwhile lover-boy attempted to side-step his responsibility by suggesting to Alma that perhaps she had double-crossed him by surrendering her virtue to some other male before she came to his house, the girl turned on him in a rage and threatened that if he didn't do something about it beside continue to cram his ersatz religion down her choking throat, she would go home and tell the whole sordid story to her father.

Recognizing her fury as the genuine article, and having knowledge of the danger of fooling around with a woman's affections, Janssen once again hid out in his study and called on a Higher Power to save him from impending doom. Presently this belated contrition brought him to his knees in prayer. Yet instead of praying for the remis-

sion of his own sins, he pleaded with the Almighty to be lenient with Alma for her fall from grace and to spare her immortal soul from eternal damnation.

In justice to Heie, he probably had no thought of destroying Alma until he suddenly recalled a passage of Holy Writ that said something like: "Fear not them that kill the body and harm not the soul."

Well, at least it was an idea. The more he thought of it, the better he liked it. Having prayed for her soul, and being certain that the Maker would answer his prayer, the least he could do was to take care of the more worldly part of the deal —killing the body, that is.

Having reached this simple decision, the Reverend Janssen went earnestly to work at figuring out the details. The axe in his woodshed seemed a bit on the brutal side to his gentle nature, and he abandoned it as an unsatisfactory instrument of execution. He had no gun. Anyway, both of those lethal weapons would leave tell-tale marks that might cast suspicion in his direction. This he must avoid at all costs. Strangulation came into his thoughts, but he rejected that because he could not bring himself to see the poor girl's eyes pop out and a swollen tongue protruding from her mouth as she breathed her last.

Then he remembered the box of rat poison in the cellar. That was the solution, without a doubt. While Heie had no pharmacological experience, he was aware that strychnine killed rodents quickly and permanently; so why not humans? Moreover, it left no outward mark on the victim's body.

Alma, meantime, still hopeful that the parson would do right by her, prepared his supper and sat, red-eyed from weeping, while he ate. She thought the relish with which he devoured his food was indicative of his decision to see her through the ordeal. It was, too, by God— only she erred slightly in interpreting his intentions as to what the ordeal was to be.

At the conclusion of the meal, Janssen folded his hands, his index fingers pointing toward heaven, and spoke.

"My dear," he purred, "I have decided that the problem we face is one that can be resolved only by asking for divine guidance. As soon as you have finished your work we will go to your room, partake of the sacrament, and pray."

Inexperienced as she was, Alma was instinctively aware of the hold she possessed on the preacher. So she thought this proposal was just ducky. A little later she went to the first floor bedchamber she occupied, and where she earlier had packed her suitcase preparatory to carrying

out the threat to go home and tell all to papa.

When the Reverend Janssen came in, he was carrying a small tray on which were two pieces of bread and glasses of sacramental wine. The smaller of the two tumblers also contained enough strychnine to exterminate all the rats in Krem.

After a prelude of characteristic ritual, the preacher consecrated the elements of bread and wine, gave both to the girl, and partook himself. He watched her slyly as she munched the bread, then almost choked on his own crust as she raised the chalice of death to her lips and drained it.

When the Reverend Janssen was certain she was quite dead, after an hour of exquisite torture, he was about to leave the room when it dawned on him that he was going to have to explain away the body. To dispose of it without being able to explain the disappearance might cast suspicion on him even if he was successful in depositing it in an unmarked grave that would never be found.

Besides, his reading told him that secret graves have a way of yawning and disgorging their dead at embarrassing moments. Moreover, if the body were found hidden away, an autopsy would certainly be performed, and then the poison would show up. Before long it came to the parson that he was sinking deeper and deeper in the muck of his own misdeeds.

A little more prayer followed. Presently he felt hot, as though burning with fever. He wondered if this was a sulphurous tongue of flame from hell's fire already licking at him.

An instant later he jumped to his feet, a relieved expression on his face. Why hadn't he thought of it sooner? All his life he had been preaching about souls burning in torment. Fire!

Now Hell itself had come to his rescue. The fire that was in store for unregenerate sinners would be his ally and consume not his soul but the evidence of his sin . . .

Shortly before midnight, the fire marshal in Krem received a telephone call from the Reverend Janssen reporting that his house was on fire and beseeching him to come a-running. When the volunteers arrived, the parsonage was enveloped, and all that mortal man could do was stand by and watch it burn to the ground.

The preacher, his hands and face burned and his clothing and hair scorched, told his story as soon as he had received first aid and regained his composure, which was badly shaken. Early in the evening, he related, he had called on a parishioner, returning home about 10 o'clock. Going directly to his study, he had sorted out some papers which he took down to the furnace and

burned, and then started work on his sermon for next Sunday.

He thought that he must have fallen asleep, for he next recalled awaking to find the rear of the house in flames. His attempt to extinguish them had failed, so he had gone to his telephone and called for help. By the time the call was completed, the fire had swept into his study and he barely escaped with his life.

"Anybody else in the house?" Deputy Fire Marshal Ben Bergeman inquired.

The Reverend Janssen shook his head.

"No, praise the Lord, there wasn't," he said piously. "As you know, my wife is in the hospital in Bismarck, and Alma said she was going home this afternoon for a visit with her folks."

Bergeman looked sympathetically at Janssen, and asked: "Who's Alma?"

When told, the fireman shrugged and turned back toward the roaring inferno.

"Well, Reverend, it's too bad, but I guess that's all there is to it until she burns out."

The next morning, when it was learned that Alma Kruckenberg had not returned to the parsonage, Sheriff F .W. Vreeland, at the county seat in Beulah, was notified and came to the scene. After talking with Janssen, he decided to search the ruins of the parsonage as a precautionary measure. The charred remains of Alma were found almost immediately.

Still no suspicion attached itself to the Reverend Janssen when he explained that he had been away all the evening and supposed the girl had gone home as she had told him she was going to, right after dinner. There were no lights in the house when he returned around ten o'clock. Of course he would not have looked in her room even had he suspected she was there, which he didn't.

"Of course not," chorused the investigators in unison.

It being the legal duty of the coroner to view the corpse in cases of violent death and determine the cause for the record, H. O. Chilson, also of Beulah, came on at the request of Sheriff Vreeland. He, too, talked with the shocked parson, and neither heard nor saw anything to arouse suspicions of foul play. After gingerly and superficially examining the corpse, still resting on the blackened springs of the metal bed which had dropped into the basement intact when the floor collapsed, he conferred briefly with the other officials and presently pronounced the verdict that the unfortunate young woman had come to her untimely end by accidental means.

"An act of God," murmured the Reverend Janssen. "He moves in a mysterious way his

wonders to perform," he continued, meaning to finish the verse. But curiously the remainder of the stanza escaped him—all, that is, except the final word, "storm."

Still somewhat shaken and nervous while the Law was hanging around, he wondered if there was anything prophetic about that word "storm." He'd heard of such things breaking around people quite unexpectedly, and the twist, which he tried to regard as a wry bit of humor, did not ease the tension in his troubled breast.

As soon as Alma's body had been removed, the sheriff and the coroner returned to Beulah, their official duties completed. Chilson said there was no need for an autopsy, as it was perfectly clear what had happened. After packing her suitcase, the metal frame of which was found under the mass of debris in the cellar, she had for some reason decided to remain at the parsonage unbeknown to her employer. Then, overcome by the smoke in her room, she had perished without an outcry.

This was not unusual, the coroner stated, since unconsciousness caused by smoke suffocation was always swift in coming. Naturally the preacher, not realizing she was still in the house, could not be reproached for making a hasty exit without risking more of his hide by looking for her.

When the officers were gone, Heie experienced great difficulty in concealing his satisfaction over the night's work. He accepted the invitation of a parishioner to house and feed him until some arrangements could be made to provide a new parsonage. The good people even took up a collection to replace his clothing and other personal effects that had been destroyed.

The next evening, he paid a call on Alma's family to console them and pray with them for the departed spirit of their daughter, which, he assured them, was tucked safely under the wings of her guardian angel in Paradise. And the Kruckenbergs swallowed all this as uncritically as the sheriff and the coroner had accepted his fanciful tale of what happened. All in all, the Reverend Janssen had reason to feel highly pleased with himself.

Meanwhile, Deputy Fire Marshal Bergeman, a man who took pride in his powers of observation and deductions concerning the origin of fires, was puzzled about how the fatal conflagration started. Not one to be content with halfway measures, or half-finished jobs, he suddenly recalled that Janssen had said he burned papers in the furnace upon going home, and then had fallen asleep. He also remember-

ed that the chimney to the parsonage passed from the basement through the wall between the kitchen and the dead girl's room. Defective flue, he thought.

Anxious to make a complete report to the state fire underwriters, who had requested information as to cause and effect before settling the insurance claim, he decided to take another look at the flue in question, which he had examined only casually that morning.

Back at the scene, Bergeman looked over the smoke-blackened bricks, then examined the opening into the chimney where the short pipe from the furnace had entered. In neither instance did he see anything to excite his curiosity. Almost automatically he pushed away charred timbers from the heat-twisted furnace and pulled open the fire door. And thus he saw a remarkable sight, for the grate was clean, and so was the ash-pit beneath it.

For an instant a look of perplexity swept across his leathery face, lined with deep wrinkles like an old shoe. Then he muttered, half aloud: "Now, why did the parson lie about burning those papers?"

The seeds of doubt having been sown, it was only a matter of hours before Doctors F. R. and L. E. Rasmussen, of Beulah, were performing an autopsy on the body of Alma Kruckenberg. The first thing they learned, and speedily, was that the girl had become pregnant approximately three months before she died. A few hours later, chemists found the strychnine in her stomach.

Sheriff Vreeland now undertook a little quiet sleuthing. From parents and friends of Alma he learned that she had never had a boy friend, and certainly had not experienced any sexual thrills before going to work for the Reverend Janssen. Moreover, she had been living at the parsonage for exactly three months.

Proceeding carefully, Vreeland called on Heie and told him what had been learned. He asked if the girl had made dates with any man, or men, while in his employ. Had she ever appeared despondent or of a disposition given to suicide?

Instantly realizing that he had been caught in a pitfall of his own digging, the parson tried to think fast and in so doing merely added to his own confusion and the mounting suspicion of the sheriff. First he said "no" to the question, then contradicted himself in the next breath by saying that Alma had confided to him that fatal afternoon that she was in love with some nameless individual.

"That was why she was going home . . . to talk to her father about it," Heie explained lamely and too late. "Perhaps she got into trouble and—"

He never finished the sentence, as the hard unbelieving stare of Vreeland cut through his thin veneer of self-possession and stopped him short.

"Why did you lie about burning papers in the furnace?" the sheriff demanded remorselessly. "There hadn't been a fire in it for days before the place burned down."

Janssen was trapped and he knew it. Yet he had now collected his wits and was shrewd enough to know that the Law had nothing substantial on him yet. He might still make his story stand up, if he stuck to it, and beat the rap. So, assuming the air of a martyr, he refused to answer further questions, and resorted to another try at the holy line, quoting scripture to prove his innocence.

"Shut up, you lying scoundrel," the sheriff bellowed, after listening to the diatribe a few minutes. "You seduced her, then poisoned her and burned the body to cover up the crime, and you know it. You ought to roast in the Hell you preach so much about," he added, while the parson cowered in abject terror.

That did it. His spirit broken, and his faith that the Almighty would protect His prophets, no matter how far they strayed from the paths of righteousness, shattered, the Reverend Janssen wept lustily over his sad predicament, and then confessed orally, and later in writing, to the murder of Alma Kruckenberg.

When word of his iniquity got out, his parishioners were first confused and half-unbelieving, then incensed at the awful truth which they could no longer ignore. Threats of a lynching were bandied around, and the chagrined suckers might have gone through with it had not State's Attorney Floyd Sperry, of Mercer County, called the turn by moving for a speedy court hearing, so that the self-convicted sinner could be carted off to prison without delay.

On the night of August 19th, 1938, District Judge H. L. Berry convened a special term of court at Mandan, North Dakota. After hearing Janssen's confession, he accepted his plea of guilty to first degree murder and sentenced him to life imprisonment at hard labor.

As the erstwhile parson was led away, he raised his head and eyes to heaven and moaned: "Verily, verily, saith the Lord, easy is the descent to Hell."

He was committed to the North Dakota State Penitentiary at Bismarck, where, Warden O. J. Nygaard informs me, he died on March 27th, 1946, of heart trouble. Those of you who may have wondered, during this recital, whether he had a heart, will no doubt be interested in this evidence that he had one, of sorts.

# the woman on the terrace

*by Melville Davisson Post*

**Seldom had Monsieur Jonquelle encountered a crime so infamous —or a patriotism more shining.**

MONSIEUR JONQUELLE, the Prefect of Police of Paris, was a moment late.

An angry voice reached him at the turn of the path. It was a tense, low, menacing voice. The words were not clear, but their intent was unmistakable. For a mere fraction of the total time he stood there he remained motionless as if in indecision. Then he went swiftly forward.

It was evening. The soft colors of a twilight day were on the Mediterranean. The many-colored city of Nice lay spread out in a semi-circle below the mountain of olive-trees and the tropical gardens of the villas of Cimiez.

There were two persons on the long terrace of the villa when Monsieur Jonquelle approached. The villa was small and exquisite —a sort of jewelbox hidden in a garden of tropical luxuriance, and inclosed by a high wall surmounted by a tile border. The villa was rose color. The tiles of the terrace and the border of

*The mystery writers who can entice and hold an audience of millions month after month with several sleuths of widely divergent characteristics can almost be counted on the fingers of one hand. Melville Davisson Post was such a writer and his great popularity is no mystery at all. It will be our rare privilege to bring you from time to time the best of his yarns, starring the sleuths who made him famous. And here, just to start the ball rolling, is a prime-vintage Inspector Jonquelle yarn, in a French Riviera setting.*

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the high wall were also rose color. It was a tranquil and sensuous bit of the world.

Monsieur Jonquelle interrupted a tragic moment.

A woman sat in a chair near the edge of the terrace. It was one of those beautiful invalid-chairs made for the out-of-doors by that Italian genius which seeks always to add beauty to the decorative aspect of a garden. The chair was white. The gown of the woman in it was blue but it looked black in the soft evening light and against the rose-colored villa and the white chair.

The woman did not move. Her small, shapely head, which rested against the high back of the chair, was crowned with a great weight of hair. It was as yellow and as heavy as gold, and was built up into a wonderful coiffure that resembled in its vague outlines the helmet of Minerva. Her hands and her elbows lay on the arms of the chair. Beside her—a step or two beyond—the man who had arrived a moment before Monsieur Jonquelle stood in an attitude of hostility.

The visible personality of the man was puzzling. That he was an American Jonquelle could instantly see. But he could not so easily determine his status or his habits of life. He had some of the physical characteristics, some of the tricks of dress of a man engaged in an artistic vocation. But that did not account for the swift, accurate, precise gestures which hinted at great skill in the plastic arts. There was a vigor and a determination about him such as one would hardly expect to find in a mere artist—an element of ruthless decision that went with a constant alertness as though he had grown accustomed to a dangerous way of life.

The attitude of the man and the voice that had reached Monsieur Jonquelle at the turn of the path were unmistakable in their menace. But the woman did not move. Neither the sudden appearance of the man, nor his words, and hostile gestures had in any respect disturbed her equanimity.

The scene changed as at the snap of invisible fingers. And Monsieur Jonquelle came up on to the terrace. The man fell into the posture of one at ease before an interrupting visitor, and the woman looked up as though undisturbed; as though no human drama, however tragic, could disturb her; as though she were forever beyond the stimulus of any human emotion.

It was clear that the man had no knowledge of Monsieur Jonquelle, but to the woman he was evidently a familiar figure. His appearance must have been an immense surprise to her, but there was no evidence of it in her voice.

She did not rise. But she spoke softly. "You do me a conspicuous honor," she said. "You must have been very much concerned about me to search me out here."

Then she presented the man beyond her. "Martin Dillard," she said, "an American—Monsieur Jonquelle."

The Frenchman and also the woman, it appeared, observed the American closely to note any recognition of either the name or the appearance of the new arrival. But there was none. Apparently Dillard did not know either Monsieur Jonquelle or his trade.

She touched a bell concealed somewhere in the arm of the chair, and a maid appeared. An added direction brought two chairs. Martin Dillard sat down where he was, but Monsieur Jonquelle carried his chair a little beyond the woman to the edge of the terrace. He put down his hat, his stick, and his gloves.

"I am fortunate to find you," he said. "I hoped to arrive a moment earlier."

The woman smiled. "In that event," she said, "you might have failed to find my friend, Martin Dillard. You will be interested, I am sure, to meet him and to know why he is angry."

She turned slightly toward the American. Her face in the soft light seemed smiling, but it was, in fact, inscrutable. "Monsieur Jonquelle," she explained, "is an old acquaintance —a *very* old acquaintance. I have no secrets from him. He will know, I am sure, precisely the reason for my flight here and your cause of anger against me."

She turned again toward Jonquelle. "Is it not so, Monsieur?"

Dillard's face bore a strange, sullen, puzzled expression. But Monsieur Jonquelle laughed.

"Yes," he said, "it is the disasters of my acquaintances with which I seem always to be concerned. Unhappily their affairs are usually known to me."

He bowed slightly to Dillard. "If Monsieur will permit," he said, "I shall be charmed to verify Madame's prediction. Monsieur has followed to inquire why the house in the Faubourg St. Germain, in the old quarter of Paris, happened to burn down."

Dillard moved, as in anger, abruptly in his chair.

"Yes," he said, "that is just precisely what I wanted to know."

Monsieur Jonquelle rose. He took a cigarette case from his pocket—it was of platinum exquisitely traced with a complicated arabesque—opened it and presented it to the woman in the chair. She declined.

"It is denied me," she said, shaking her head, "as all things are now denied me."

Dillard also refused, and Monsieur Jonquelle returned

with his cigarette to his own chair on the border of the terrace.

"I, also," he said, "as one whom Madame has so courteously called 'an old acquaintance,' am interested in knowing why this house at the corner of the Rue de St. Pere on the Faubourg St. Germain has burned to the ground. It will be necessary to make some explanation to the authorities of Paris. They will be curious about it. And it has seemed to me that I ought to do my best to aid them, as a simple matter of duty."

He paused an instant, then went on. "There is no question of insurance, nor the right of any property owner in the matter. Monsieur Martin Dillard owned this house by purchase some months ago. He carried no insurance on it, and it was stored only with his personal property and used only by himself with the charming assistance of Madame. There was not even a servant about. The doors entering the house were all fitted with a complicated American lock with two keys only—one for Monsieur and the duplicate for Madame. The windows were securely closed with heavy shutters. The house was wholly inaccessible to any but these two persons, and it was the exclusive property of Monsieur.

"If it had not burned, we should not have been concerned about it. Romantic attachments do not provoke an inquiry in Paris; but the city authorities are concerned with fires. When flames reduce to ashes an ancient house on the Faubourg St. Germain some explanation must be given."

He paused again. He had now gotten the cigarette lighted, and was puffing on it thoughtfully.

"Madame has correctly expressed it. I *am* an old acquaintance. But I am also more than that. I am an old acquaintance who is determined to get Madame's explanation before the authorities in Paris as soon as I can manage it. Her flight after the fire was unwise. I had the greatest difficulty in finding her."

Dillard spoke abruptly. "You seem very much interested in 'Casque d' Or.' "

Jonquelle's voice was a slow drawl. " 'Casque d'Or,' " he said. "The expression is a felicitous one. Madame's golden head used to be the wonder of Paris when she appeared like a Minerva in—but no matter. It is the fire which concerns us."

Dillard spoke again abruptly. "You seem to know all about 'Casque d'Or.' "

Again Monsieur Jonquelle drawled his answer.

"I do," he said. "From her golden head to the blue pigeon delicately outlined on her hand between the thumb and the forefinger—every detail of Madame has been of interest to me. And

now I am concerned about the explanation for this fire."

Dillard broke in. His voice was no longer restrained. "I don't see what you've got to do with it," he said.

Monsieur Jonquelle did not once reply. He looked at his cigarette as though it were somehow unsatisfactory. He puffed on it until the tip glowed; then tossed it over the edge of the terrace into the bushes.

Almost immediately the bushes parted and two strangers appeared on the terrace. They were footmen in a rather conspicuous foreign livery. They paid no attention to either Monsieur Jonquelle or Martin Dillard. They addressed themselves with apologetic diffidence to the woman in the chair. They explained that a parrot belonging to the Princess Kitzenzof, who occupied the great villa above, had escaped and was concealed somewhere in the thick shrubbery of Madame's garden.

Would they be permitted to search for it? The woman in the chair moved her head slowly in assent. Then she dismissed them with a gesture. They went down off the terrace and toward the rear of the villa in their search, and the woman in the chair turned toward Dillard.

"You must believe me," she said, "that Monsieur Jonquelle is really an old acquaintance, and I owe him an explanation. Neither of you shall be disappointed. You came to hear my story, precisely as he has come. The two of you arrived nearly at the same moment, and I shall be pleased to include you both in what I have to say. You were demanding an explanation as Monsieur Jonquelle arrived—with some heat, if I remember correctly."

Dillard replied in his abrupt manner. "I don't want to seem unreasonable," he said. "But I do want to know how the house happened to burn while I was absent. You are the only person who had a key to it. You must have burned it or you would not have run away and hid yourself. Now, what's the story?"

The woman had a delicate lace handkerchief in her fingers. She put it up a moment to her lips. Then she spoke, addressing her two guests. Her voice was slow, serene, and detached, like one who speaks without interest, without emotion, and without any concern for effect. It was like a voice from a mechanical appliance, having intelligence, but no will to feel.

"I have been attached to Monsieur Dillard," she said. "There was a fortune before us—an immense, incredible fortune. The anticipation of it bound me to him, and so the burning of the house must have been an accident. The lure of a fortune is

the only influence that does not diminish as one advances into life—in a world where soon every other emotion fails. Therefore Monsieur Dillard had a right to feel that he could trust me, since my interest in this fortune was identical with his own."

She paused, and seemed to address Monsieur Jonquelle directly.

"You will be concerned, Monsieur, about the mystery of this fortune. It was no dream, and depended upon no uncertain hazard of chance. Monsieur Dillard is an artist with a genius for turning his art to a practical use. There have been greater artists than Monsieur Dillard, but none have known better how to make art serve a practical purpose. Under his guidance art can be made to produce a fortune. It is the life-work of Monsieur Dillard not to produce new art, but to bend the artistic skill of the masters of art to his immediate advantage. And, in this, he has no superior in any country.

"The house in the Faubourg St. Germain was in fact a storeroom. It was, at the time of its destruction by fire, literally packed with masterpieces—beautiful works of art of an incredible value."

She did not move the position of her body in the chair. But she again vaguely touched her lips with the handkerchief in her fingers.

"Monsieur," she said, "there have been in the world three men who are supreme in what is perhaps the highest of all artistic production. I shall name them to you: Monsieur Whistler, the American; Monsieur Helleu of Paris, and Wagenheim of Munich."

She moved a trifle in her chair. Then she went on. "The misfortune of producing a masterpiece in oil or in water-color is that one copy only of the masterpiece exists, and if by any misfortune it is destroyed, every adequate evidence of its beauty has disappeared forever. That is the unfortunate feature attached to the work of all the great masters. But it is a misfortune that does not attend the etchings of Monsieur Whistler, Monsieur Helleu, and Herr Wagenheim. The beautiful faces of the lovely Americans preserved by the etchings of Monsieur Helleu can be reproduced in any number. That beauty does not depend upon the jeopardy of a single picture."

Her voice seemed to advance, but not with the stimulus of any emotion.

"It is not commonly known," she said, "that an extreme skill is required to obtain in the prints all the beauties of these etchings. The prints are commonly made by copyists having only the usu-

al workman's skill. But it was always realized by the masters of this art that the extreme and delicate beauties of their etchings could only be produced by an adequate skill—by a skill, in fact, almost equal to their own in the printing of the picture. This skill constitutes the peculiar genius of Monsieur Dillard—a skill which he has striven to perfect, and which he has finally brought to the highest excellence.

"He labored in the house in the Faubourg St. Germain for a long time and with an incredible patience, until he became the superior of any man living. And the house, as I have said, was literally packed with the most beautiful and the most valuable reproductions in the world. The accumulated treasure represented the incredible fortune which was to be shared by Monsieur Dillard and myself.

"It was on the night when he went to Bordeaux to make some arrangement for the removal of the treasure that the unfortunate fire occurred that wiped out our fortune in an hour. It left Monsieur Dillard penniless and myself with only the ruin of another illusion. And it happened, Monsieur, in the simplest fashion."

There was absolute silence on the terrace before the villa. The vaguely blue sea seemed to underlie a world of amethyst. Heavy odors were in the air, and a little beyond the terrace the leaves of a flowering vine moved where the footmen of the Princess Kitzenzof searched as noiselessly as ghosts for the lost parrot. The shadowy figures of the two servants were outlined to the woman in the chair, and, perhaps, to Monsieur Jonquelle. But they were not visible to Dillard.

He sat like a tense figure in some organic medium, grim, rigid—always in that immobility which seemed to await the next word before it flashed into violent life. It was as though Madame's words were the delicate scalpel of a skilled surgeon moving about a nerve which it never touched, but which it constantly menaced.

"It was the simplest accident," the woman repeated in her placid voice. "The original etchings of an artist like one of the three which I have named are priceless. They cannot be replaced.

"To guard against the house being entered after the reproductions had been made, these originals were placed under some rubbish in the basement. The basement had not been entered for a long time, and when the originals were concealed there care was taken not to disturb the appearance which this room presented of not having been opened for an incredible age.

"The room was low, with an earth floor. The ceiling was of

wooden beams dried out and beginning to decay, each as inflammable as tinder. The whole of this ceiling was hung with cobwebs, laced over the separate beams, hanging like veils in shreds.

"On the night of the disaster, before leaving the house, I went into this basement to make sure that the originals stored there remained as we had placed them. It was late, and I took a candle. That was a fatal indiscretion. When I arose from an examination of the place where the etchings were concealed, the lighted candle came in contact with the hanging spiderwebs, and immediately the whole ceiling flashed into flame. In an instant it seemed to me that the entire ceiling of the room was on fire. I had barely time to escape before the room was a furnace.

"In terror I let myself out of the house. As the basement was without windows, the fire was not discovered until I had gotten entirely out of the neighborhood of the Faubourg St. Germain.

"I was so overcome, so numbed by this incredible disaster that I did not stop to consider any result. I sought only to escape from Paris—to conceal myself somewhere. I thought of this villa, but I did not dare to take the train from the Gare de Lyon. I traveled in an automobile, winding southward from France. Not directly, for it was necessary to confuse any one who might endeavor to follow."

Again she touched her mouth with the lace handkerchief. There was a faint red stain on it now. She looked at the stain, but without emotion, and presently added:

"But I did not succeed. Monsieur Dillard and Monsieur Jonquelle have been able to trail me here with an equal facility, it seems, and within almost the same period of time. I cannot have managed my travel with discretion."

She stopped abruptly. For a moment there was silence. The two men beside her did not move, but their aspects changed. Dillard seemed to relax; his tense energy to ebb. The menace in him changed to an aspect of disaster. On the contrary, there came into the posture of Monsieur Jonquelle a certain tenseness.

He spoke, addressing the American. "Monsieur," he said, "is it true that the basement room of this house was hung with cobwebs?"

The man replied as though his jaws were stiff. "Yes," he said. "The whole rotten ceiling was hung with them. I always went in with an electric flash. But a candle—good God! What an accident!"

Monsieur Jonquelle rose.

"Monsieur," he said, "this was no accident. I will show you."

The villa had long been closed. He went over to a shutter, unhooked it, swung it a little open. He removed an immense cobweb, and came back to the border of the terrace.

Dillard, amazed and in a profound interest, moved to where he stood on the border of the terrace before the woman in the chair. The woman alone seemed beyond any concern. She neither moved nor spoke. She smiled vaguely, maintaining her posture of repose. Dillard could not conceal his interest.

"Not an accident!" he said. "What do you mean?"

Monsieur Jonquelle held the web up in his fingers, struck a match, and touched the web with the flame. There was no flash. The filaments of the web merely shriveled a little under the heat.

"I mean," said Monsieur Jonquelle, "that a spider-web is not inflammable and therefore the basement of this house could not have taken fire from the flame of a candle."

After that, two events seemed to happen as though they had been timed. The woman laughed, and the angry American lunged toward her. But Monsieur Jonquelle's foot caught his ankle with a swift outward turn, and Dillard plunged headlong on the terrace. He got a heavy fall, for all the vigor of the infuriated man was in action.

What followed seemed to happen with an equal swiftness. The two footmen of the Princess Kitzenzof quickly took charge of the prostrate figure. Instantly his hands and feet were secured; a gag was in his mouth, and they had removed him.

It was all like a flawless scene in a drama, rehearsed to the last perfection of detail. In thirty seconds it was ended.

"Monsieur," said the woman in the chair, "you are very clever, and your agents are perfect."

She had not moved during the whole violence of the scene, and her voice was now in no way changed. It was the same detached, unemotional voice. She removed her hands from the arms of the chair and extended them, the slender wrists together.

"Do you wish me, also, to accept the *gage d'amour of the Service de la Sureté?*" she asked.

Monsieur Jonquelle regarded her levelly. "Tell me, Madame," he said, "why did you destroy this house in the Faubourg St. Germain?"

The woman replaced her hands on the arms of the chair.

"Monsieur," she said, "at the end of life, in the face of a death that is inevitable, I have suddenly come to understand a circumstance that has been an inscrutable mystery to me."

She extended her hand, on which was a plain, narrow, worn, gold band.

"This bracelet," she said, "worth perhaps a dozen francs, was given me by Jean Verlain, a boy who loved me. He was killed in the first year of the war."

She moved her hand, taking from her throat an immense necklace of pearls, matched and priceless.

"This necklace," she said, "was given me by Count de Lamare. He was killed in the great allied advance on the Somme."

She extended her hand to include the place about her.

"This villa," she said, "was given me by the Marquis de Nord. He died at Verdun."

She paused.

"Monsieur," she said, "I, a child of Montmartre, an apache, called 'Casque d' Or' from the effect of my yellow hair, which I had been taught to put up as though it were a headdress of Minerva. I, who had faith in nothing realized that these men —Jean Verlain, who loved me, and who also loved life; Count de Lamare, who loved me, and who also loved pleasure; the Marquis de Nord, who loved me, and who also loved power—these men loved something other than me, or life, or pleasure, or power. They loved it infinitely more; loved it beyond any measure of comparison, for they left these things and went eagerly to death for it.

"I thought about it, Monsieur. It obsessed me."

She suddenly rose as with a single gesture, as though she had been lifted to her feet by invisible hands.

"Then suddenly, Monsieur, with a flash of vision, on that night when I was alone in the house in the Faubourg St. Germain, I understood this thing. I saw that the work in which Monsieur Dillard was engaged—that the prints with which the house was literally packed—would help to destroy the very thing which these men, Jean Verlain, Count de Lamare, and the Marquis de Nord had given their lives to save.

"It would help to destroy France—and, therefore, I took a candle in my hand and burned it. Do you know what the valuable prints were with which this house in the Faubourg St. Germain was crowded on that night?"

"I do," replied Monsieur Jonquelle, "or I should not have taken these elaborate precautions to secure Martin Dillard.

"The house in the Faubourg St. Germain was packed with counterfeit notes of all the high denomination paper currency of the French Republic, printed by this man, from plates etched by the German engraver, Wagenheim of Munich."

# a four-letter word

*by . . . Geoffrey North*

**When murder rears its ugly head a bent for solving crossword puzzles may come in very handy.**

A GOOD MANY men spend most of their free time gambling. Others just can't resist a good-looking woman. Then there are the horseplayers. I always keep one eye on the mirror when I'm close to any of those dangerous temptations.

Probably I'm different. I've got just one serious failing and it keeps me up all hours of the night. It's solving cross-word puzzles. I can never resist one. I try to do a puzzle at one sitting, marking down the time it took me to solve it. There are just two rules I follow—no dictionaries, and no consulting outsiders.

I'm desk sergeant down at the Gulf Street police station in Southport. I'm on days—eight to six. There's not much excitement in doing desk work, for a copper who has been battling crooks for twenty years on the outside. It was my game leg that made them decide to give me that routine, monotonous desk job.

For me, it's dull routine. The days drag, and I'm always glad when it's six o'clock and I can head for home and take up where

*When a police officer is also a widower with two kids overseas and a liking for simple pleasures he becomes a sympathetic character straight off. And Geoffrey North knows exactly how to make that sympathy blaze and soar in a tight-webbed drama of suspense and mayhem with a climax thrillingly adroit.*

I left off on the crossword puzzles.

I'm a widower with two kids. Dan's with the fleet off Formosa, and Theresa's married and lives in New York. It's a long wait between letters. Luckily, I've got the crosswords to keep me company.

This particular night, there was an unusually difficult layout in the Southport *Sentinel*. I had it about two-thirds solved when I came across a four-space vertical that stumped me. The tabulation for it was: *Down—36, Zany*. I knew the first letter, all right. It was "F." So I was looking for a four-letter word beginning with "F" that means *zany*.

This one stumped me good and proper. I racked my brains for a full hour, but I just couldn't figure it out. Then I started trying four-letter words beginning with "F"—hit and miss—as they came to me. I tried "flag," "frog," "flaw," "flax," "flea," and probably twenty-five more. But none of them fitted.

I heard the clock in the tower of the Melhorn Building boom twelve times. I keep regular hours, and midnight was as late as I ever stayed up. So I put the paper aside and turned in. But I couldn't sleep. That word *zany* kept bothering me. I spent a restless night, tossing and turning until just before dawn.

Usually I get up at six o'clock, automatically as the Melhorn tower clock strikes the hour. But that morning it was almost seven by my watch when I awoke.

I hurried through my shower, telling myself I'd been a fool to let the puzzle upset me. While I shaved, I listened to the local news on the radio. The announcer's voice was crisp and to the point: "If the Southport citizens want the correct time, they will have to consult their own watches or their televisions and radios. The great clock in the tower of the Melhorn Building boomed its last at twelve midnight. The famous timepiece is being dismantled. A new, modern one will be installed in about a week."

That explained why I'd gotten up an hour late. It was a bitter disappointment to me, for it meant that now I wouldn't have time to pick up my daily *Sentinel*, and find out how the crossword puzzle had been worked out by the paper's own expert. I'd have to wait until noon to see the solution. You can't read newspapers behind a police blotter.

I buttoned up my uniform, put on my cap, and was about to click off the radio, when another announcement came over the air:

"Police have been notified to be on the lookout for Clyde McKettrick — brown hair, ruddy complexion, age twenty-eight. He is six feet, two inches tall, and usually wears thick-lensed

glasses. McKettrick is suspected of having shot and killed Edmund Farnswood of One-twenty-seven Jackson Street, during a quarrel over a woman early this morning."

Southport for years had been content to bask lazily on the Gulf and let the rest of the world go about its own affairs. But the Korean war and, now, the defense program had changed all that. It had become—the last seven years—a boom town with all of the trimmings. Airplane works, steel factories, shipyards had mushroomed overnight, and an old infantry training spot, Camp Florida, that had nestled inconspicuously on the outskirts of the town, had increased in size a hundredfold.

Southport's streets now swarmed with workers, soldiers, and sailors, and only the old Gulf Section, where my stationhouse was located, had kept some semblance of the old South. Decatur Park with its palmettos, cypresses, and bronze cannon of ancient vintage, was still somnolent as of old. As I strolled past it on my way to work that morning I was grateful for the way it had managed to remain out of step with the forward march of time.

On a long, iron-scrolled bench near the gate sat a lone man—a young fellow, by the looks of him, his head down low and his hat pulled down over his eyes. He seemed the very picture of despondency, but he didn't look the least like a bum. I wondered what he was doing there so early in the morning.

I smelled the smoke first. Then, an instant later, I heard the scream. Before I could discover what had caused the disturbance the young fellow on the bench sprang up, and started to race across the street. Then I saw that smoke was curling from the window of one of the vine-bowered houses opposite the park. The screams were shrill and piercing now.

I lumbered after the youth as fast as my game leg would carry me. By the time I'd gotten across the street, the husky fellow was battering the door of the burning house with his shoulders. Framed in swirling smoke, a woman stood at a window with a small white bundle in her arms.

I stumbled up to the porch, and yelled to her not to leap. Then I joined the young man from the bench. Together we put our shoulders to the door and heaved. There was a sound of breaking wood, and the door collapsed with a splintering crash.

The hallway was full of smoke, but I could see the stairway clearly enough. The husky fellow was half way up before I got started. The smoke was suffocating and the flames were licking over the bannisters.

I limped up as fast as I could, the smoke half blinding me. I could hear some one shouting, "Don't jump!"

I got to the head of the stairs somehow, despite the almost unendurable heat. A sheet of flame was sweeping across the space in front of me. Directly before that blazing barrier I saw the young fellow dragging the woman along by her arm. She was holding the bundle close to her breast.

"Take the kid," he shouted. "I'll carry the woman down."

I took the bundle from the woman as he lifted her in his arms and started toward the stairs. A pall of smoke swallowed them. I heard him go tramping on down as I stumbled ahead. The kid clawed at my cheek, and its arms went around my neck.

I managed to stagger erect, and stumble on toward the stairway. I don't know how I ever got through those hissing flames.

As I limped through the front door into the sunlight, I heard a great crackling sound, followed by a crash. The stairs had fallen behind me.

I flung myself flat on the ground, the kid wailing against my coat, and just breathed deeply for a minute or two. The woman lay on the ground near me, and the husky youth was bending over her. Off in the distance I could hear a fire-engine's clanging. I rose to my knees and watched the engine sweep up to the curb with a great rattle and clanging of bells.

"By God," I yelled to the youth. "Maybe I've got it. A four-letter word beginning with 'F.' 'Fire' ought to work. Look here, by friend, does *zany* mean fire?"

The young man looked at me as if I had gone suddenly crazy. The fireman and some cops came running up to us.

"Now that I've atoned," the young fellow said to me, "I can give myself up. Arrest me, officer."

"Arrest you? What for? You didn't set fire to the house, did you?"

"I'm not a fire-bug," he said. "I'm a murderer. I'm Clyde McKettrick. I shot a man this morning."

"Brother, you don't look like a killer to me," I said. "And you don't act like one, either. Murderers don't risk their lives for other people. Killers hate to die."

He reached in his pocket, took out a pair of spectacles and put them on. Then I noticed that one of his eyebrows had been singed off. His suit was scorched and there were burns on his hands.

"Listen, officer," he said, his eyes blinking bluely beneath the thick glass. "Fifteen minutes ago I was planning to run out of town and hide out from the Law. Now I've recovered my

courage and self-respect. My emotions got the best of me this morning. I did away with one life—but now I've saved another. I'm ready to take what's coming to me."

It sounded fantastic to me. I was curious to hear McKettrick's story, but Jack Andrieesen, who walked a beat on my precinct, and who had ridden to the fire with the engine-men, had seen me. I told him what had happened, but didn't give McKettrick's right name. Then Andrieesen and I got the woman bundled off in the care of some neighbors.

I asked Andrieesen to report my activities at the station-house, and to tell Ben Quinley to take care of the desk. I told him I'd be in later, after I'd run down a hot clue on the Jackson Street killing.

"Come along, Buddy," I said to McKetrick, and left Andrieesen scratching his head and watching the firemen put out the blaze.

I took McKettrick in to a luncheonette and over coffee and a cigarette we had our talk. "Boy," I said to him, "if it weren't for those glasses you'd be a ringer for my son, Dan. He's in the Navy."

"That's where I'd be today it it wasn't for my eyes," McKettrick replied. "If I could have made the Navy I wouldn't be in this mess."

"Okay, tell it to me from the very beginning," I said. "Maybe we can puzzle a way out of it."

"Not much chance of that," sighed McKettrick, crushing out his cigarette. "I killed a guy all right. But it wasn't premeditated. Like I told you, on account of my eyes, I couldn't pass an Army or Navy physical. I'm working in the ship-yards. I can see well enough to swing a hammer. Well, maybe I better start from when I first met Rita. That was in New Orleans. That's where I was raised up."

I thumbed McKettrick another cigarette, and he went on: "You see, the three of us, Rita, myself and Ed—Ed Farnswood, the man I killed this morning—were brought up in the same parish in New Orleans. I was crazy about Rita as a kid and so was Ed. But Rita favored me. We grew up, and became engaged. I wanted to get married before I joined up. But Rita said to wait.

"Well, I was rejected for the military, and I got a job in a New Orleans shipyard. Then my boss sent me here to Southport to help train new workers. They sent Ed Farnswood here, too. Rita decided she'd come along and get a job to be near me.

"The three of us found quarters on Jackson Street. There are two rooming-houses there, run by a Mrs. Avery. In one house I got a double-bed with Farns-

wood. In the house next door Rita got a pleasant room for herself.

"Well, Rita and I had planned to marry in the very near future—as soon as we had five thousand dollars saved up. I'd been making high wages for three years, and the money is in a joint-account under both our names."

McKettrick lit another cigarette. "That's the background," he said.

"Go on," I urged. "What did you kill Farnswood for?"

"I thought he was playing around with Rita. I shot him in a jealous rage when I heard him talking in her room this morning. Now I see what a blundering idiot I've been all along."

"There must have been more to it than that, son," I said. "You must have suspected them for some time."

"Not exactly," he replied. "George Linney first gave me a hint about the situation."

"Who's Linney?" I asked.

"A fellow who works with me. He rooms in the same house that Rita does. He told me a few days ago that he saw Farnswood slip into Rita's room one evening. You see Farnswood gets off a couple of hours earlier than I do, because he works a different shift. I was half out of my mind with suspicion and jealousy. I decided to get off early this morning and find out about Farnswood and Rita."

"You saw them together?" I asked.

McKettrick bit his lip. "Maybe I was wrong. It was this way. I got home two hours earlier than usual—about two-thirty. I saw there was a light gleaming under the shade in Rita's room, and I quickly let myself into the house. The same pass-key opens the front door of both houses.

"I went down the hallway on the second floor. I heard Rita laughing and I heard a man's voice—Farnswood's. I heard him saying, 'What Clyde don't know won't hurt him.' I suspected the worst. I was burning up with rage, bitterness, and jealousy. I felt betrayed by the two people I trusted above all others. All I wanted at that moment was quick revenge—even if I hung for it."

McKettrick clenched his right fist and laughed bitterly. "Now that it's done, neither of them mean a thing to me. Nothing at all."

"Go on with your story," I said.

He heaved an enormous sigh. "I ran to my room for my gun. I looked under the mattress, where I'd left it, but it wasn't there. Then I saw my Colt. It was on top of the dresser. How it got there I don't know. I thumbed the cylinder. The six slugs were in place. I jammed the gun in my pocket and went out of there into the other house.

"The next thing I remember

I was in front of Rita's door. I heard Farnswood laughing and she was calling to him from another room. Her door wasn't even locked. I throw it open, and saw Farnswood lounging on the bed. I was all choked up with hate. I pressed the trigger of my gun—and kept pressing it. Farnswood just lay there, his body jerking a little as the bullets struck him. I threw the gun down. I was acting by instinct. I ran down the hallway. Some one came out of a room and grabbed my arm.

"It was Linney, the other roomer in the house where Rita lives. He was in his robe. 'Where did those shots come from?' he demanded. I told him what I had done. 'My God!' he cried, 'you would better get going somewhere before the police come.' "

"So you followed Linney's advice?" I asked McKettrick.

"I was too muddled to think clearly. I ran out of the house. I went into an all-night eating place. It was three a.m. by the clock. I had coffee, and more coffee. I stayed there for two hours, debating with myself whether to surrender to the cops or skip town. Finally I wandered out, stumbled across the street. There was another all-night lunch joint. I filled myself with more coffee. I left there finally, walked to the park bench, and just sat there trying to decide what to do. That fire and rescue snapped me back to reality."

He smiled at me wryly. "Now you better lock me up."

I decided to check up on McKettrick's story. I left him at the table, and went into the phone booth. While I talked to Quinley over the wire, I could watch McKettrick. I feared he might have a sudden change of heart and decide to move out on me. But McKettrick just stayed there, slumped in his chair, while Quinley gave me as much as they had about the Jackson Street killing.

Most of what Quinley told me jibed with McKettrick's tale. Officer Maull was in charge of the Jackson Street house. He was still questioning the girl, Rita Illington, Mrs. Avery the landlady, and the roomer, George Linney. I hung up.

"Let's get out of here," I told McKettrick.

I went with him and checked back on the two eating places he'd mentioned. They remembered him in both places. He's been in the first place from three to five a.m. In the other one from about five to seven.

"One thing seems strange to me," I said to him. "Why was it your gun happened to be on your dresser instead of under the mattress where you always kept it?"

McKettrick shrugged. "Yeah, I thought about that, too."

Out on the street I flagged a cab. Half an hour later the driver stopped at the corner of Jackson and Cypress, the west edge of town. You could hear the guns popping off, over on the rifle range in Camp Florida half a mile away.

I got out of the taxi with McKettrick. A newsboy came running by with some papers.

"Hey, kid," I yelled, "give me a *Sentinel.*"

"All sold out," said the boy, "nothing but Jacksonville and Mobile papers left."

"Never mind then," I told him.

That word *zany* was still worrying me. Well, I'd have to wait to find out what it meant, wait until I'd settled this murder business. "Come along," I said to McKettrick.

We got to number 127 Jackson Street. A north wind came rattling around a corner. I shivered. January in northern Florida gets plenty chilly sometimes.

Maull was expecting me. He said, "I got Widdicombe upstairs with the body. The doc says it happened between two and five a.m., not earlier or later." He pointed a horny finger at McKettrick. "Who's that with you? Newspaper guy?"

McKettrick grinned sourly. "I'm the guy you're looking for."

"He says he's the killer," I said. "But it looks screwy to me."

Maull growled. "Take it over. Maybe you can put the pieces together."

We were downstairs in Mrs. Avery's parlor. It was warm as toast there, for the furnace was going full blast. "Will you call in the girl and the other roomer?" I asked Maull.

She was a knock-out, all right. Just a little below medium height with auburn hair, smooth, white skin, and come-hither eyes. She saw McKettrick and ran to him.

"Clyde," she cried huskily, "believe me, honey, I'm innocent of any wrong. Ed and I were just having a talk when—" she burst into tears, and flung her arms around his neck. "Oh, why —*why* did you do it?"

McKettrick removed her arms firmly, his eyes cold. "That's all over Rita," he said in a dry voice. His face was white but his jaw was set. "It was all a ghastly mistake. Not only what happened today, but from the very beginning."

Then I saw the tall man—George Linney. A handsome, blandly smiling fellow in his late thirties. I couldn't quite place him at first, but I knew I'd had dealings with him at some time in the past.

Rita Illington sat in a chair and sobbed. McKettrick nodded to Linney. "You see, it was no use."

Just then Maull came in. "If there's anything you want to ask these people, go ahead, Jim."

"Okay," I said to Linney. "I've seen you somewhere, haven't I?"

Linney grinned. "Yes. Maybe five years ago. I was running a tent show on the shore one summer. I needed a license. I think we smoothed the matter out all right."

Then I remembered. Linney had had a ventriloquist act. He worked with life-size dummies. I'd seen his performance. It was pretty good, as such things went.

"Yes, sir," said Linney, "I've quit carnival life. I've got myself a factory job now."

"What do you know about this killing?" I asked.

Linney looked at McKettrick a long minute. McKettrick shrugged resignedly. "Tell 'em the truth, George," he said. "I've come back to take my medicine."

Linney turned to me. "I was awakened by some shots. I ran out of my room, and saw McKettrick coming out of the girl's room. He told me he had shot Farnswood. Then he ran out of the house. I went into the girl's room. Farnswood lay dead on the bed. Four bullets had killed him —two in the head and two around the heart."

Linney nodded toward the girl. "She was too hysterical to tell me anything that made sense. I wanted to give McKettrick a break, so I didn't notify the police right away. I waited until Mac could get a good start for a getaway—maybe an hour."

Maull whirled on him, growling. "That's not the story you told me. You said you never saw McKettrick."

Linney spread his hands. "I'm telling you now. That's the way it was."

"That's how it was," said McKettrick. "I'm guilty. Nobody else is mixed up in it."

I left them all there and went up to the room where Widdicombe was standing guard. I lifted the sheet off the corpse. The two holes in the body and the one through the forehead showed that Farnswood must have faced the gun when he got the three slugs. But the hole that started in at the base of the skull was what puzzled me.

There was a lot of blood on the bed, and some plaster had been nicked from the wall. The old-fashioned gong-clock on the mantel had been smashed. The hands stood at 2:35.

Widdicombe pointed at the clock. "That's when it happened. One of the slugs must have stopped the works dead."

The mute evidence of the smashed timepiece seemed to corroborate McKettrick's own statement as to the time of the killing.

I went downstairs and asked Maull to bring in the landlady. I wanted to talk to her alone.

Soon a sharp-nosed, skinny female, about fifty, scurried in. "Officer says you wanted to talk to me, sir," she said. She went to the hot-air vent, and turned off the heat. "I wonder who put all that wood in the furnace?" she remarked.

"Mrs. Avery, what can you tell me about all this?"

She wiped her skinny hands on her apron." As I told the other officer, my bedroom's in the basement. I was awakened in the middle of my sleep by some shots. But I didn't think much of it, figuring they came from the camp, which is not far off. I figured it was some sort of night target drill. I went back to sleep.

"Then at three a.m. I woke up again. I knew it was three because I heard the Mellhorn tower clock boom the hour. It struck three times. I wondered why it sounded so muffled. Well, I dozed off again. Then some one rapped on my door. It was Mr. Linney. He told me about the accident. It must have been about four o'clock. The police came around shortly after that."

"You'd oblige me if you'd let me see Farnswood's room."

She took a brass key-ring from her apron. "Follow me next door," she said. "Mr. Farnswood shared the room with Mr. McKettrick."

Outside of some letters addressed to Farnswood, there was not much in Farnswood's room to interest me. I decided to take the dead man's correspondence with me for a more thorough going later. I asked Mrs. Avery for something with which to wrap up the letters.

While she hunted around, I was reflecting on her statement that she had heard the Mellhorn Tower clock strike three times. I knew she was mistaken, for the Mellhorn clock had been silenced for good some hours previously. So it must have been some other clock that she had heard.

Mrs. Avery scurried over. "Here's something to wrap those letters in," she said.

She handed me a newspaper. It was a Southport *Sentinel*. It was dated the morning of the murder.

Now I could snatch a few seconds for myself and see how that crossword puzzle had panned out. The word, *zany* was still bothering me.

I turned to the puzzle page. Down in the corner was the solution of the puzzle I'd worked on the night before. The four-letter word that had had me stymied was *fool*. So that was what *zany* meant!

I took a quick glance at the top of the page, to see what the layout of the day's new puzzle looked like. I was surprised when I saw that half of the blank spaces had already been penciled

in. The letters weren't printed. They were in script.

"Say!" I exclaimed to Mrs. Avery, showing her the penciled words, "Whose writing is this?"

She squinted at the paper. "Why, that's Mr. Farnswood's. I'd know it anywhere. Nobody else slants his letters like that."

"Have you got any other samples of his writing about you?" I asked.

"Why, yes. There's a check for his room rent. He gave it to me yesterday." The old woman fished in her dress and came out with a piece of blue paper. "Here it is."

It was Farnswood's check, and the handwriting on it was identical with the writing in the spaces of the crossword puzzle I had just discovered.

"Never mind wrapping those letters!" I yelled, grabbing the newspaper and skipping out with it as fast as my game leg could carry me.

I went back into the other house, where Maull was talking things over with Linney. Rita sat by the window, her eyes red-rimmed, staring into space.

McKettrick managed a sorry smile as I came in the room.

I said to him, slapping him heartily on the back, "Do you know what *zany* means, my boy?"

"No," said McKettrick. "Do you?"

"It's what you've been all along," I cried. "A fool!"

"Don't rub it in," said McKettrick.

"Look here," I asked him, "what else beside the five thousand dollars did you share in common with the girl here?"

"Some real estate in Louisiana, three thousand in War Bonds. Also a lot of furniture, some insurance and four lots on the Gulf here."

"All told, it adds up to about what?" I asked him.

"All told, maybe fifteen thousand. Why?"

"More fool you, then!" I said. "What becomes of it all if they take you away?"

"What good is any of it to me now?" He pointed to Rita, who was eying me intently. "She'll get it all."

I pounded McKettrick on the back. "Relax, brother," I said.

I went over to Linney, and said to him, "What did you do with the dummy?"

Linney's jaw dropped. He stared, and a lot of color drained out of his face. Then he affected a puzzled look. "What dummy?" he said. "What are you talking about?"

"About the life-size dummy you dressed up in clothes and put in the girl's room. The dummy that McKettrick shot, the dummy that McKettrick thought was Farnswood in the flesh."

Linney laughed good-naturedly. "Where'd you get that idea? Why in the world would I want

to put a dummy in Rita's room even if I had one?"

I could see a film of worry clouding Rita's eyes. McKettrick took off his glasses, and began polishing them. Maull had his hand over his hip pocket.

"Why would I put a dummy in the girl's room?" repeated Linney.

"So McKettrick would shoot at it and think he killed Farnswood?" I said.

"What would that have gotten me, I ask you," replied Linney, smiling amusedly.

"If you could have worked it all out as you planned it, about fifteen thousand dollars in money and real estate, I guess—to divide up between you and the girl."

Maull broke in, "Look here, Jim. McKettrick, himself, said he had heard Farnswood's voice in the room."

"That's right," McKettrick asserted.

"I figure that was Linney imitating Farnswood," I said. "I know, Linney, that you once were a pretty fair ventriloquist. You must have retained your ability."

Linney laughed scornfully. "That's a pretty fantastic tale you've rigged up. It's your invention, all of it. Okay then, find the dummy! That you can't do—because there never was one."

"You no doubt broke it up and burnt it in the furnace by this time," I said. "But I don't need it to prove that McKettrick didn't kill Farnswood."

Maull rubbed his jaw. "How are you going to get around that confession of McKettrick's?"

McKettrick stuttered at me, "You m-m-mean, I'm not a m-m-murderer?"

"I mean it, so help me," I said. "You got bad eyes, brother. You didn't see Farnswood on the girl's bed. It was a wooden dummy. You heard an imitation of Farnswood's voice. And I know you didn't kill Farnswood, because Farnswood was alive and healthy after you ran out of the house. You've got an air-tight alibi, my boy." I clapped him on the back. "Now sit back and relax, while I wind this up."

Rita was rolling her handkerchief into a little ball. Linney managed to hold his smile while he tamped a cigarette on the arm of his chair.

Maull asked me, "What about McKettrick's alibi?"

"Here it is," I said, and held up the puzzle page from the *Sentinel* that I'd taken from Farnswood's room. "See this crossword layout. It's worked half way through. The writing on it is Farnswood's handwriting. That fact I've checked and positively identified. Well, the point is this. The paper's dated today and *the earliest the* SENTINEL *gets on the street is three a.m.* That means that Farnswood was alive at three o'clock and for

some time after, too. Long enough to work some of the words in the puzzle, until he was disturbed."

Linney wiped his face with the sleeve of his coat.

"Follow me for a minute," I continued. "So then, we know Farnswood was alive at three a.m. Well I've got proof that McKettrick was in the Busy Bee Coffee Pot between three and five a.m. So then, McKettrick didn't kill Farnswood!"

"Listen, Jim," said Maull, "if McKettrick didn't do it, who did?"

"Yeah, that's what I'm coming to," I said.

I walked over to Rita. "Which one of you killed Farnswood?" I asked her.

She sprang from her chair, her face as white as a sheet. "It wasn't me," she cried! "I'm going to tell everything!" She moved in front of Linney, stamping her foot in rage. "You blundering imbecile," she shrieked. "It was all your crazy idea!" She pointed a dramatic finger at him. "You shot—"

Linney whirled and leaped toward the window. McKettrick had been waiting for it. He hurled himself through space, and two bodies met in midair.

When they fell, McKettrick was on top. His fist beat a tattoo on Linney's skull. They locked arms, and began rolling over the carpet. A long hand with a blue-barreled gun in it whipped free. It was Linney's hand and gun.

There was a roar. Linney's gun skidded on the carpet. McKettrick got his hands on Linney's wind-pipe and squeezed.

Maull said, "Not bad. Got him, first crack." He ran over and snapped the cuffs on Linney.

McKettrick straightened up, came to me, and gripped my hand until I winced.

Mrs. Avery came running in. "I thought I heard something," she said.

Maull turned to me. "I can't figure how killing Farnswood would get Linney and the girl fifteen grand."

"Maybe you'd like to explain that?" I asked Linney. He looked at his bleeding wrist, his face set in defiant lines.

"Nuts," he said.

"I'll talk," Rita said, darting a look of hate at Linney. "*He* tempted me. I fell for his smooth line. We planned to get all of Clyde's property. We figured that once Clyde was behind bars I'd have the handling of his estate. We rigged the dummy, as you guessed."

"It seems you went about the whole thing in a pretty fantastic manner," said Maull.

"Not so fantastic as it appears in the telling," I said. "Bear in mind, there was no risk in the fantastic part for the plotters. The first and essential step was to have McKettrick believe he

was a killer and then hope that he'd be guided by instincts of self-preservation and try for a getaway. That part had to be worked out for certain, before Farnswood was knocked off."

"But suppose," said Maull, "that McKettrick had decided not to run off?"

"Then the jig was up as far as the plan was concerned," put in Rita, keeping nothing back in an attempt to save herself. "If Clyde had decided to stay and face the music for his supposed crime we'd have told him it was all a hoax, planned to show him how silly his suspicions were."

She sobbed and went on, "I was crazy to listen to *him*." She hung her head. "Linney told me he'd planted the seeds of suspicion in Clyde's mind and that Clyde was set to fall for our plan. So we waited and watched for him as he came home last night. Well, you know how Clyde reacted."

"Tell me about Farnswood," I said.

She raised her eyes and looked at me. "We knew when Farnswood was due home. It fitted in with our plans. He came in a few minutes after three, and we saw his light go on. Linney reloaded the gun that Clyde had thrown on the floor. Then he went to Farnswood's room and did what he did. I helped him bring the body down. We put it on the bed, and we fixed the clock so that it pointed to about two-thirty. Then we smashed it."

"Fixing that clock *fixed your clock*," I said, grimly. I turned to Mrs. Avery. "That's the clock you heard when you woke at three a.m. Not the Mellhorn Tower clock. It gave me my first hint that there was something phony about this murder business."

"Well, after we fixed the clock," Rita finished, "we broke up the dummy, and set fire to it in the furnace. Then we called the police."

"And they're still on the job, sister," jeered Linney, "and all you're gabbing won't help you beat the rap."

McKettrick rode over with me to my station-house. "It just all goes to show you," he said, "that you can't tell about a woman. And I did have my mind set on marrying and raising a family."

"Where there's life there's hope," I reminded him.

When I entered, Quinley was dangling a kid on his knees. "Say, Jim," he greeted me, "the little widow's here and asking for you and another guy."

Then I saw a brunette with merry blue eyes come tripping across the floor and making a bee-line at McKettrick. She flung her arms around his broad shoulders.

"What did I tell you?" I said.

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# the murderer's ring

*by . . . William MacHarg*

**If you're a cop's best friend when he's on a kill-and-vanish case—it's smart to look dumb.**

DAN O'MALLEY said, "This is a case where a guy was taken for a ride. He was on the front seat of whatever kind of car they were in and somebody on the back seat shot him in the back of the head and they pushed him out in Morningside Park.

"We don't know who he was and we don't know who they were and we ain't going to be able to find out. But we got to go and look at where they found him. This is the place."

We got out and looked at it.

"Nobody knows this guy," O'Malley said, "so he probably comes from somewhere else. Everything had been taken out of his pockets and there ain't a label or a laundry mark that could be traced. How you going to solve a case like that?"

O'Malley picked up a brightly colored scrap of paper out of the grass; then he picked up a second, then a third and a fourth. The scraps said *Square. 40¢* and bore serial numbers.

"Here's more trouble," he observed.

"Why?" I asked. "Those are only the halves of motion picture theatre tickets that the customers

*When Officer O'Malley unravels crime's Gordian knot the English language is bound to suffer. But that doesn't matter at all to dyed-in-the-wool partisans of William MacHarg's famous sleuth. To like him the way he is comes naturally.*


Copyright, 1930, by William MacHarg

keep. Anybody might have thrown them away."

"Sure. Probably anybody did. But it's all we've got. If I was goin' through a guy's clothes and found those I'd be likely to throw 'em away as not meaning nothing. There's a hundred squares in this town and every one of 'em has got a picture house named after it. And we don't even know if it was this town. There's plenty others.

"Well, we got to go and ask. He was found in Manhattan, so we'll start in Brooklyn. If he'd been found in Brooklyn we'd do the other way about."

We drove to Brooklyn. The sixth picture theatre identified the tickets.

"You couldn't remember who bought those tickets, sister?" O'Malley asked.

"Not a chance," the young woman told him.

"But you can tell when they were used?"

"Sure," the young woman assented. "Last night. The numbers show that."

As we were driving back, O'Malley turned to me and said, "Well, nothing in that. It didn't lead nowhere. So we're back where we started and we'll have to try something else. I'm going to call the office."

He went into a telephone booth and I waited until he came out again.

"They got the guy identified," O'Malley stated. "He came from Buffalo. He had a roll of money on him and was going to Paris. His baggage is at the pier and he didn't show up. He didn't know anybody in New York, so it probably was like this:

"He met some fellows he'd never seen before and they saw his roll and said, 'Let's go to such and such a place and have some fun.' He said all right; but Morningside Park was where he stopped. How you going to find out who they were? You can't. Well, I got to go to a newspaper office and put in an ad."

We stopped at a newspaper office and O'Malley wrote his ad. It read: *Found. In—Square picture theatre Thursday night. Diamond ring with engraved motto. Valuable. Owner phone Butterfield 0001 for appointment.*

It was my telephone number.

"What's this about a ring?" I asked.

"This here's the ring."

O'Malley gave it to me. It was a big white diamond and inside the gold band was engraved *'Fide, sed cui vide.'*

"That's a fine ring," I said. "It must be worth several thousand dollars. And it's a wise motto: 'Trust, but be careful whom.' But what's all this got to do with this business? Was it the dead man's ring?"

"It was on him," said O'Malley.

"But what's the idea of saying

you found it in the theatre? Who do you expect is going to answer the ad?"

"Listen," O'Malley said. "What you don't know you won't be thinking about. If I told you who might answer the ad, maybe you wouldn't be so useful to me.

"All you got to do if someone calls you about the ring is say you found it under your seat in the theatre. At first you was going to turn it in at the theatre office, but then you saw it was valuable and decided to advertise it."

The next morning the ad appeared in several newspapers. In the afternoon a voice called up and, an hour later, the speaker appeared at my apartment. He was a short man, heavy set and dark. He looked steadily at me.

"You got the ring?" he asked.

"I have. Can you describe it?"

"Sure. It says inside of it, 'Fid sed q vid.' "

"That's right," I confirmed.

I gave him the ring and he took a roll of money from his pocket.

"I don't want anything," I told him.

"You're a square bird, but if you live to be a thousand years old you'll never have a nickel."

He went out and I went to the window to look down and watch. He got into a car across the street and drove away. So I called up O'Malley.

"Are you asleep?" I asked him. "Why weren't you on the job here? A man came and claimed the ring and I gave it to him and he's gone away."

"What you trying to do now?" he asked. "Be a detective?"

The next day he called me up.

I met him and we drove to Brooklyn. It was a dismal street of once fine houses. There were men in citizens' clothes about, but anyone who didn't know they were cops had better go and live somewhere else.

Four of them went up with us to the second floor and there they broke down a door. There were three men inside, and one of them was the man who had claimed the ring. They didn't fight because the cops had the drop on them.

After they had departed in the mesh-wire convertible, I turned to O'Malley and said to him. "Now maybe you'll tell me what all this means. Of course you had the man who came for the ring followed, and he led you to the others."

"Sure. It was the way I guessed all along. The dead guy met these three guys and they saw his roll and got friendly with him and got him to go along with them."

"I don't mean that," I said. "I mean the ring."

"Oh, the ring was under the dead guy's armpit," said O'Malley. "When one of 'em dragged him out of the car with his hands under the guy's arms, his ring

came off and stayed there. The ring had been stolen a year ago in a jewel robbery. I figured it was worth enough so that, if he knew where he lost it, he'd have taken the chance of going back to look for it.

"So he didn't know where he'd lost it and, if they'd been to the picture theatre and he saw the ad, he'd think he lost it there. I couldn't tell you that because when he come to see you he was looking for a plant. If things looked suspicious he'd say it wasn't the ring he'd lost; or it might be even that he'd bump you off."

"Much obliged," I said sarcastically, "for permitting me to take that risk."

"There wasn't no real risk," he said, "the way you'd do it."

"It was smart police work, O'Malley. You've the right to feel proud of it! And I'm pleased you realized that I would do it as it ought to be done."

"Sure," O'Malley answered. "The guy wouldn't suspect nothing as long as you looked dumb, and I figured you'd do that."

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*One of science fiction's most popular storytellers enters the mystery lists for the first time—to tilt at crime in a brand new yarn of exceptional brilliance*

## DEATH OF A HONEY-BLONDE

**By ISAAC ASIMOV**

*Blood-stained gloves and a disappearing corpse weave a skein of dark violence for Lord Peter Wimsey to unravel, in a most unusual detective mystery thriller*

## A CASE FOR LORD PETER WIMSEY

**By DOROTHY L. SAYERS**

*in the next issue*

# the weeping woman

*by . . . Robert Arthur*

**Sergeant Dudley thought he knew why the woman was weeping. But between his wild surmise and a hangman's noose were—obstacles.**

DETECTIVE SERGEANT Dudley, on his hands and knees, was peering at the wet grass with all the intentness of a pointer that has raised a quail. A slow and dismal rain made little rivulets of water on the gray rubber slicker that stretched across his back, and some of the water was running off and onto his trouser legs. Paying no attention to the elements, Dudley clumsily picked off the ground, where it had been hidden by grass and mud, a round pellet the size of a marble.

He rolled it in his hand, then put it away in a pocket. It was merely a ball of tinfoil, of the heavy variety that comes with certain brands of cigarettes. He looked carefully and found another, and beside it a large burnt match. Then for the twelfth time he poked a finger into a triangular dent, two inches deep, in the sod.

Shaking his head bewilderedly, Dudley lifted himself upright with a sigh and a grunt. He turned sadly to his aide, Denny

*A woman's tears, as a sagacious wit once pointed out, should never occasion terror in the male. If a man has the presence of mind to weep too, openly and unashamedly, the woman will quickly change her tactics. But here is a terrifying instance to the contrary. A woman's tears become wholly sinister, in one of the most grippingly unusual and suspenseful murder mysteries Robert Arthur has ever penned—and he has turned out some truly memorable thrillers.*


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Connor, as he felt of his trouser legs.

"Probably get sciatica rheumatism," he muttered, "besides a bawling out from the missus for spoiling a pair of pants that've just been cleaned and pressed. It's a crime what they charge for cleaning and pressing. Something oughta be done about these racketeers—"

Denny Connor, having been standing impatiently in the rain for ten minutes while Dudley crawled about on the lawn, interrupted him. "What," he asked, "were those little balls, Sarge? Are you takin' on the job of picking up the paper and rubbish for the Horndale Apartments, or did you have a reason for saving 'em?"

Sergeant Dudley was experimentally straightening his back, wincing. When he was sure he could stand upright, he answered.

"Neither, Denny," he said. "Neither. Do I got to have reasons for everything I do? Can't I be curious just for once? I just seen 'em, and I took 'em, as the shoplifter told the judge."

He stood back, pushing against a bedraggled row of rosebushes. In front of him rose the cold stone wall of the massive Horndale Apartments. In fact, as they were standing in the inner court of the building, the walls rose on all four sides of them.

The Horndale Apartments had been built especially to give people who could not otherwise afford it, a Park Avenue address. Something like a block square in outside dimensions, its inner court had a driveway, a dozen decorative trees, a sunken garden, flagged walks, real grass, and a multitude of second-rate rosebushes. The rosebushes, instead of running in straight lines, were placed in little semi-circles all along the walls so that each half circle enclosed a few square feet of lawn. It was in one of these little areas the sergeant and Denny were standing.

The grass was wet and the ground soft. The rosebushes were beaten down by the rain, that had been falling for many hours and was only beginning to ease a little. At their feet was a space where the grass had been flattened by some weight, and there was still the vague outline of a lying body, the head towards the wall. It was at this flattened area Sergeant Dudley had been peering.

"He was lying there," Dudley said aloud, more meditatively than informatively. "There, with his head almost touching the wall. His head was busted. The doc said something with an edge or corner to it had given him a good, hard sock across the skull —a leg of a heavy chair, maybe. No blood—the rain had washed it all away. His neck was broken

too. It must have been a tough sock he got."

Dudley paused to pull out a black cigar, of the kind he only smoked when his mind was getting busy on a hard problem, and stuck it between his teeth.

"You see, Denny," he said, "this guy Kenny Wilson, who was a pretty good criminal lawyer, went out of his apartment last night leaving his wife and a girl friend up there talking. The rain was coming down like blue blazes at midnight, too—solid sheets of it. Well, Wilson didn't come back. His wife says—I had a few words with her earlier—that she wasn't worried, but only peeved. It seems Wilson has been getting a nasty temper in the last year. She said four times already he's dashed out and spent the night at a hotel. He seems to have been a touchy kind of guy. Maybe he didn't like the company.

"But last night he didn't go to a hotel. He spent the night right here." He pointed to the vague outline of flattened grass, his face grim.

"Right here, through all that rain, dead as a herring. He wasn't found until six-thirty this morning, when the house gardener got to work to clean up some of the damage to the roses. Wilson was lying just like that—on his face, his head about two feet out from the wall, his hat partly under him. The gardener left off work and called us."

As a man who turns many things over in his mind, Sergeant Dudley rolled the cigar in his lips and puffed thoughtfully while he scratched his thick neck.

"You see, Denny," he said, "this case is kinda puzzling. Question one is, how did Wilson get killed? Question two is, why was he left here? Question three is, why was he killed? There's complications."

Denny Connor carefully tossed his cigarette butt into the rosebushes. "He was slugged," he suggested practically. "He was slugged, and somebody dragged him here to hide him."

Sergeant Dudley sighed moodily. "It seems likely," he conceded.

"Now, if somebody slugged him here on the steps, or in the courtyard here, it's plain enough they'd have to leave him here. There's only the one exit from this place, and the doorman on duty keeps watch of everybody that comes in or goes out, either on foot or in a cab. So the body couldn't be taken out, and hid. They'd have to leave it. That's reasonable enough. But who slugged him? And why?

"So far as we can learn, he hadn't any enemies, at least not in the building, and if he did, nobody could have known he'd be coming out just at that time.

There's still a lot of complications, I claim."

"Maybe he fell down the steps," Denny suggested.

"There ain't no steps. There's only the elevator," Dudley grunted. After a moment he added: "They've taken Wilson to the undertaker's. And they've got the doorman who was on duty last night down to headquarters. They phoned me saying he claimed he hadn't seen Wilson since Wilson got home at six p. m. But they recognized him as an ex-con who'd dropped out of sight. The boys at headquarters think it was him."

"Sure." Denny brightened. "That's it. Wilson is a criminal lawyer, see? He recognized the con. The con thought Wilson would tip us off, so he bumped Wilson. Plain as glass."

Again Dudley sighed. "It sounds *too* good," he said. "Me, I'm always suspicious when a thing sounds too good. But I guess that's the way this case is, all right. At first this looked like it might be an interesting case. A guy killed in a rain storm, and hid behind rosebushes, underneath his own window—"

He pointed up. "That's his apartment, right straight up—tenth floor."

"Let's get out of here," Denny suggested. "This thing is all washed up, and my feet feel wet."

Dudley shook his head. "Got to go up and talk to Mrs. Wilson again," he said. "She fainted when we brought her the news first, and then began to get hysterical. I got to go talk to her again when she's a little more calm. There's still the possibility of somebody in the building having a grudge. I got to find out about that. Somebody *could* have seen Wilson and taken the sudden opportunity to pop him."

He turned and led the way along the narrow flagstone path to the entrance to this particular section of the mammoth apartment building.

"I suppose she'll still be crying," he said gloomily. "I wish I could work on a case where there wasn't a woman crying around, Denny. If there's anything makes me nervous, it's a crying woman. No tears for me—but I always get 'em."

He was silent, rolling the cigar between his big lips, while the elevator shot them up to the tenth floor.

The tenth floor apartment that Sergeant Dudley and Connor entered was large and well-furnished. A maid met them at the door and showed them into a living room.

"I'll see if Mrs. Wilson is dressed," she said. "The doctor was here to see her, and she's been lying down." She went out.

"A pretty swell dump," Dudley said thoughtfully, looking

about him. "I've picked up the dope that Wilson wasn't making too much dough, either."

He turned and walked over to the wide window. It opened on the courtyard. He shoved it up and poked his head out, peering about him. There was nothing much to see. Dudley looked down. Directly below him, so directly that a plumb line would have hit it, was the spot where the body of Kenneth Wilson had been found.

Dudley drew back and was about to close the window, when a woman's voice sounded behind him.

"It's—it's so dreadful, Sergeant," she said in a choked voice. "I—I can't bear to think that Ken was lying there all night, under my very window. It's too terrible!"

Dudley turned after closing the window, wiping the rain from his face, to confront Mrs. Wilson. She was a tall woman, and handsome. Her face was hard, as so many New York women's faces are hard, and her eyes calculating. But in the negligee she was wearing, her hair loosely fluffed about her head, she was really extremely handsome. And her shaken grief was obvious.

The burly sergeant went at his task a little reluctantly. He disliked questioning women. They were too apt to be emotional.

"There's some details I still got to get, Mrs. Wilson," he said. "About what happened last night. You weren't able to tell us much earlier."

Mrs. Wilson had been dabbing at her eyes with a fragment of lace. Now she sat down in a lounge chair and looked up at him.

"I'm—I'm sorry I've been so upset," she apologized. "I think I can talk calmly now, though. But I haven't been able to collect myself very well this morning. The shock—"

Dudley waved a big hand. "Sure, sure," he said hastily. "I understand. Now, Mrs. Wilson, I'll tell you all the facts we got to date, and you correct me if I'm wrong. Now last night you were entertaining a friend—"

"Mrs. Johnson, who lives across the hall," Mrs. Wilson put in.

Dudley nodded. "I've already talked to her," he admitted. "She—"

"What did she say?" Mrs. Wilson asked sharply.

"I'm just coming to that," the sergeant said. "According to her story, you and she was spending the evening just talking, and the two of you was in your bedroom, while Mr. Wilson was out here in the living room, reading."

"That's right," the woman nodded. "Poor Ken—he *did* dislike women's talk so. Chatter, he called it, and gossip, and

scandal-mongering. So I thought it would be better if we left him to his book in peace. Sometimes —sometimes Ken was a little difficult about things. He made scenes and called me names—" She sobbed and dabbed at her eyes again. "But of course I made allowances for it. He worked so hard it was enough to make anybody a little snappy."

"Well," Dudley continued, "Mrs. Johnson said that after you'd been talking an hour or so, you mentioned a cocktail. And then you got up and came out here, closing the door behind you. She heard Mr. Wilson swear pretty loud, and a door slammed. Then you came back and told her he'd put on his coat and stamped out to go to a hotel."

Mrs. Wilson sniffed pitifully and turned appealing eyes on Sergeant Dudley.

"It—I guess it was my fault," she faltered. "I came out to ask him if he wouldn't like to mix up some cocktails for us. And he said no, that there wasn't anything in the place to drink. And I told him he'd promised to bring some home with him, and that I thought it was pretty careless of him. And then he got up and shouted at me that a man couldn't think of everything, and that he was sick and tired of being nagged at. And then he w-went out—" Mrs. Wilson was reduced to sobbing again, but after a moment she conquered her feelings.

"You see," she said, "he'd had a hard day, and it *was* thoughtless of me to upbraid him. I don't really blame him. But since he'd done it before, I wasn't worried when he didn't return—only upset. I went to the window there, and tried to call him. But it was pitch black, and he couldn't have heard me anyway, the rain was so loud. Mabel —Mrs. Johnson—went home shortly after that, and I went to bed. And then they woke me up early this morning to tell me —to tell me—" Again she buried her face in her handkerchief. In resigned silence Dudley waited.

It was an interruption that shut off the tears this time. The phone rang loudly, and Mrs. Wilson composed herself to answer it. Then she handed it over to Dudley.

"It's for you, Sergeant," she said.

"Headquarters, I guess," Sergeant Dudley grunted as he put the receiver to his ear. "H'lo . . . yeah this is Dudley . . . Sure, I been working on it. Didn't get much yet . . . Yeah . . . Th' hell . . . Coincidences do happen, sure . . . You're pretty positive, huh? . . . Dumb of him . . . Yeah, I'll send her down."

He hung up and turned resignedly to his aide. "Well, Denny," he said, "guess we can

knock off. They got the guy. It was the doorman at that."

Mrs. Wilson gave a startled exclamation and seemed to bounce to her feet, a fierce and exultant expression on her face.

"They've got the beast who killed him?" she explained. "Oh, I'm so glad! How did they catch him?"

Sergeant Dudley looked a little puzzled. "Well," he said, "we already found out this Alexander, the doorman, is really an ex-con named Bergman. Also, the boys have now discovered your husband once defended Bergman on a serious charge about five years ago. He got him off. Bergman beat it without paying him his fee. The boys' theory is—"

"That Ken recognized this fellow, and the man killed him?" Mrs. Wilson asked excitedly.

"Yeah," Dudley agreed. "Their theory is that since Bergman was on duty nights, your husband never got a good look at him before. But last night, going out in the rain, he stopped in the doorman's cubbyhole to have a cab called, and recognized Bergman then. He said something about it, and Bergman, afraid your husband was going to call a cop, slugged him, and found he'd hit him too hard. Then he didn't know what to do. He got rattled and dragged your husband's body into the bushes.

"But that don't explain everything to me. Why didn't Bergman lam afterwards, and try to get out of the city, anyway? He should have known it'd be traced back to him."

The sergeant scratched his neck. "There's never any telling what a killer's going to do," he admitted. "When you've just killed a guy you're bound to be rattled and do funny things. So the boys are charging Bergman with it."

"Thank God they caught him!" Mrs. Wilson said. "I just couldn't think of the man who murdered my husband going free."

"Sure," he said, "I'd feel the same way about it. But I got to ask you to come down to headquarters with me, Mrs. Wilson. They want you to give evidence whether your husband ever mentioned to you that he'd recognized Bergman, and some of those details. You see, Bergman's story is, your husband recognized him long ago, but promised not to say anything about it, since the guy was tryin' to go straight. Did Mr. Wilson tell you about it?"

"Not a word!" Mrs. Wilson exclaimed. "And I'm sure he would have—if it wasn't all that man's lie from start to finish. Surely I'll go with you, Sergeant. It'll take me about half

an hour to dress. Please excuse me."

She swept out of the room. For a moment Sergeant Dudley stared at the door she had closed behind her, chewing his cigar stub thoughtfully. Then absently, almost aimlessly, he moved around the room. He stopped by a writing desk that was open in one corner and thumbed through some papers lying on it. He picked up a package of cigarettes and put them down again. He ran his eye along a shelf of books above the desk, picked out a couple of them and thumbed through the leaves, then put them back, being careful not to let their edges protrude.

Then, abandoning the desk, he moved over to the window and stared out at the dreary rain. The draggled ends of the curtains came in for inspection, then he threw the window up and looked out again. From his pocket he took one of the tinfoil balls he had retrieved and carelessly dropped it, abstractedly watching it fall. He closed the window, and threw himself into a large easy chair where he stared into vacancy for five minutes.

It was the entrance of the maid that aroused him at last. She was carrying a wastebasket and she moved towards the front door.

"Whoa!" Sergeant Dudley snorted suddenly, and bounced from his chair. "Where you going, sister?" he demanded.

The maid looked naturally startled. "Down the hall," she said. "To put this trash down the incinerator. Why?"

"I'll go with you," Dudley said. "We'll have a little talk."

"But—" the maid began.

"Sure," Dudley said, and opened the door for her. "A pretty, brainy girl like you—you're the kind of girl I enjoy talking to."

Almost dazedly Connor watched them go out. The maid looked neither pretty nor brainy, but he understood the sergeant's methods.

"Now I wonder," he asked the thin air, "what the old fox is up to?"

Shaking his head, he stepped over to the writing desk. The papers the sergeant had gone through were newly received bills. The cigarettes were an ordinary brand. The books on the shelf were all detective and mystery stories, but Denny could find nothing interesting in them.

Frowning in perplexity, the short and stocky detective moved to the other side of the room and into the kitchenette that opened off it. He poured himself a drink of water, and leaning against the electric icebox he thoughtfully drank it.

"I wish the sarge wouldn't be so secretive," he muttered, and lit himself a cigarette.

A minute later Sergeant Dudley and the maid returned, the sergeant looking, to Denny's practiced eye, complacent, and the maid a little scared. The sergeant was carrying the wastebasket, and he set it down in the kitchenette. Denny saw an old newspaper crumpled in it.

"Now mind, sister, not a word to anybody," Dudley admonished the maid, and she nodded unhappily as she left the room.

Then the sergeant drew Denny aside.

"Denny boy," he whispered mysteriously, "I'm going to send you and the lady downstairs without me. When you get down, wait for me out in the courtyard. Take off your hat and lay it on the ground where I picked up the tinfoil, and stand aside. That's all."

Five minutes later Denny Connor found himself standing out in the dripping rain with the modishly dressed Mrs. Wilson at his side. The sergeant had remained behind on the specious excuse that he had to phone headquarters that they were on their way.

Denny was wondering if the sergeant had gone crazy, but he obeyed orders. He stepped over through the rosebushes and into the small space where Kenneth Wilson's body had been found. There he dropped his hat on the ground at the designated spot and stepped back, noticing on the woman's face a look of stark surprise. It was a look that Denny matched an instant later.

High above him a window opened, and Dudley's grizzled head appeared.

"Hi, Denny!" he called down. "Watch!"

For an instant he held some object poised, and then dropped it. It came down with ever increasing speed, until with a vicious and muffled sound it struck the crown of Denny's hat and drove it violently into the soft ground.

With one long scream Mrs. Wilson fainted very completely.

"You see, Denny," Sergeant Dudley said some time later, almost sorrowfully, "there are dames and dames. You didn't notice this one looked kind of touched to be cryin' so much? Or that she was wearing clothes from the most expensive shops in town? Also you didn't know what I learned, by asking around, of Mrs. Johnson, and the maid, —that Kenneth Wilson was sort of stingy, and all his quarrels with his wife was about money. And you didn't know he had a hundred grand insurance policy. Or that he'd mentioned divorce more than once lately in his quarrels with his wife.

"Well, Denny, all those interestin' facts prove nothing. We knew she was not out of her apartment last night, and that

her husband was. And if she stayed in, it looked a cinch she couldn't have done much to her husband, no matter how much she might have liked to. And there was this Bergman, a handy pinch. It looked like he was on the spot, all right.

"But, Denny, I'm awfully suspicious of dames who're extravagant, and whose men pass out under strange circumstances. And I had this to go on. When we looked at Wilson's body this morning his hat wasn't on, but he was lying partly on it. And that burnt match was under where the hat was. To me that sort of looked like a man had lit a match in the rain and covered it with his hat to keep it burning.

"Well, even so. Why should a man go out of his apartment in a rain storm in the middle of the night to light a match and cover it with his hat? There ain't but one answer—to find something, and to find something valuable. And how would anything valuable get there, where he was? Answer: It would have to drop out a window. *So!*

"So, Denny, in my mind I built up an idea of something valuable being dropped from a window, and of a man going to light matches to look for it. And of that man being killed. How can you kill a man who's directly underneath your window? The answer to that one is easy—drop something on his head.

"And right there, Denny, I hit a snag. How could a man be got to a spot like that when nothing had really been dropped? If there had been anything he was looking for, we'd have found it. And how could anything be dropped on his head with no sign of it being left later? We know the person who dropped it didn't have any chance to go remove it. The answer to that one ain't so easy. But I got a motive and a opportunity. I'm not going to quit for lack of a weapon.

"Well, Denny, I see the dame reads detective stories. I looked over her list. Some good ones there. You ought to read them—'The Big Clock,' 'Death Wears a Mask,' and some of the others. I'd read most of them. And lookin' at them, I remembered the plot of one. Then it suddenly comes to me, kind of.

"Then I go out to talk to the maid and empty the trash, and I get a break. You saw that old newspaper, Denny? That's the tip—I found it in the trash and saved it. I learn the lady, Mrs. Wilson, went out yesterday afternoon in the rain, carrying a market basket, though she usually just orders from the building grocery store. And she comes back with a few groceries and something in the basket wrapped in newspaper. The ele-

vator boy remembered that. And the dame had admitted opening the window—to call to her husband, she said. I could see it had been opened in the rain, from the condition of the curtains. So, Denny, what do I figure from all that?"

Denny sighed, and threw away his cigarette.

"Sarge," he said, "I'm just dumb. I'd never have seen it. You claim she got him out of the house somehow, got him underneath the window, and dropped something on his head when he lit the match? And all the time she was able to prove she hadn't left the house, so they'd hardly be any suspicion against her. Is that it?"

"That's it, Denny," the sergeant told him. "I'll bet she worked it like this. She came out and opened the window, saying she felt faint. She leaned out a bit, and then popped back and told Wilson her locket, or something, had dropped off—something valuable. She said it would be in the grass below, and he should run right down and find it. If it was left there, the rain might wash it away. That argument would appeal to him, him being sort of tight. He'd get up to get it. But he'd swear about it.

"So he went out. Now of course he'd told her about the ex-con doorman. She was remembering that, and counted on us picking him up. That dame is brainy, and hard.

"So she gets hubby right underneath the window. She sees him light the match. Then she takes the thing she's got ready and drops it. Bingo, he's gone. She closes the window, goes back to her talking, and the rain takes care of everything. Some women can be devils, can't they?"

Denny was silent, pondering something. "Listen, Sarge," he demanded. "How in hell did she destroy the evidence—I mean get rid of what she dropped? You dropped a glass on my hat, I know, but of course she didn't—"

Dudley sighed. "You'll never learn to think for yourself, Denny," he said plaintively. "She dropped a ten-pound chunk of ice on him, of course. That's what she bought and brought home wrapped in a newspaper. Got it around on Lexington Avenue. Had to, because she's got an electric box, and she needed a big chunk. That paper I saved was the paper it was wrapped in. Many a time I bought ice that way for the missus.

"The ice melted, of course. The rain washed away all trace of it, and covered up wetness we might have noticed otherwise. That little hole in the ground was made by a corner of the chunk. And she got the idea out of one of those books she read. There's something like

it in 'Murder in the Summer House.' Not just the same, but close enough to give a clever woman like her the idea.

"And if you're still curious, Denny, those tinfoil balls were sighting shots. She wanted to know just how far from the wall something dropped would hit. The cigarettes on her desk were wrapped in the same kind of tinfoil. Any more questions?"

Denny grunted and got out another cigarette. "It was smart, Sarge," he admitted. "Her crying had me fooled. I guess you know more about women than you say."

The sergeant shrugged off the remark.

"Not so much, Denny," he said. "I already told you I don't like having women cry, but I always expect 'em to. But when I see a woman sob, and sob and still no tears come, I begin to get suspicious. That was what made me suspicious of her to begin with, Denny. She kept crying and crying, but there wasn't any tears."

He nodded. "No tears at all."

*In a very special sense this month's issue of* THE SAINT'S *companion magazine,* FANTASTIC UNIVERSE (*now on sale*) *should have an irresistible appeal to mystery lovers who have so far had only a very glancing acquaintanceship with science fiction. For at the heart of each of its three featured novelettes there glows an astoundingly breathtaking enigma, a challenge to juggle space and time and man's inscrutable destiny and the very stars themselves in a kind of cosmic game far more fascinating than Scrabble. All of which is just another way of saying that you can't afford to miss* THE IVORY TOWER *by Milton Lesser,* A QUESTION OF TIME *by Edmund Cooper and* SATAN ON HOLIDAY *by Ralph Bennitt. Actually, in Mr. Bennitt's story, the mystery is further enhanced by a touch of the Satanic.*

# tragedy for three

*by . . . Peter Harris*

**A murderer's key may unlock a door, or a nest of accusing hornets.**

THE MILLIONS from coast to coast who read in their newspapers the morning after the double tragedy at Hampton Cove wondered why two such socially prominent young people as Brenda Styles and Ward Johnson would put an end to their lives. Both were wealthy, good-looking and popular, and had apparently everything to live for.

Captain of Detectives John Farrell did not take superficial views. But he could not understand it either. Most of all he could not understand why this suicide pact—if suicide pact it actually was—had departed from precedent in that the girl had shot her fiance first and taken her own life afterwards.

Although the medical examiner declared that both had died about the same time, Brenda had been shot in the head at close range, and young Johnson had been killed—undoubtedly by the same revolver—from a distance of several yards. So it looked very much as if he had been the first to die.

Then there was the unaccountable fact that Brenda had packed a suitcase just before the tragedy.

*Though an aura of grim inevitability hovers about the justice meted out in this chilling little yarn by Peter Harris it has all the psychological deviousness of a well-planned crime that came out with only one tiny flaw in the wash.*

Had she perhaps planned to go away with her fiance? Farrell thought it possible, but certainly there was no suitcase in Johnson's car, which he had left outside the block of garden apartments in which the couple lay dead. It looked, moreover, as if Johnson had intended his visit to the apartment to be short, for he had left his car key on a ring with his other keys inside the car.

Farrell made a careful search of the luxurious apartment in which Brenda had lived alone, but could find no clue as to her intentions. She had no bank books or file of legal documents, for the unearned income on which she had lived was managed for her by the family lawyer. There was a small mahogany desk in the living room where the bodies had been found, and it contained such odds and ends as bills from dress shops and florists, monogrammed stationery, an expired passport, a Valentine, and an old high school photograph, in which it was just possible to recognize Brenda as she had been seven or eight years before.

When Farrell got back to the police station later that evening he found an extremely agitated young man waiting for him.

"I knew it would happen," the youth burst out as soon as the detective had introduced himself. "That's why we planned to go away. But we waited too long. I'll never forgive myself for not making her realize how dangerous Johnson was."

"Suppose you begin at the beginning," said Farrell.

"All right. My name's Ralph Winter. Brenda and I were in love. We met about six months ago at a party, and at that time she was engaged to Ward Johnson, though she was beginning to regret it even then. Later she tried to break it off, but he wouldn't listen. He was madly in love with her, and I guess he kept hoping she'd change her mind and marry him after all. He used to pester her."

"In what way?"

"He'd follow her everywhere —he'd even wait outside her apartment and try to talk to her. Then, when he found out that he was getting nowhere, he began to threaten her."

"Did Miss Styles tell you all this?"

The young man nodded his head. "Brenda told me. We were to be married. But of course we had to keep it secret for the time being."

"And so what did you do?"

"We planned to go to an upstate town together and get married before Johnson could interfere. He was quite capable of making an ugly scene. In the meantime, I gave her my revolver, though I never dreamed she'd have to use it as she did."

"So it was *your* revolver," said Farrell. "We were just about to trace it."

"Well, I've saved you the trouble. I phoned Brenda last night to confirm that I had train reservations for today, and we arranged to meet this afternoon."

Winter fumbled in his wallet and showed Farrell the tickets. He went on: "She was terribly upset, because she'd just had a phone call from Johnson. He'd somehow found out about her plan to leave town, though he didn't know the exact time. He—he threatened to kill her.

"I'd heard about those threats before. I told her to lock herself in her apartment and admit no one and she promised me she would. It slipped both our minds at the time that Johnson had once had a key to the apartment which she'd given him a couple of years before. That was my last talk with Brenda. I went to the station this afternoon to meet her, but there was no one there."

"I see," said Farrell thoughtfully. "So what do you think may have happened?"

"At a guess, I'd say that Johnson used his key and walked into the apartment. She killed him—in anger or self-defense—and then, shocked by what she had done, she shot herself."

"And at a guess," said Farrell, "I'd say that you are lying. I don't know yet what your relationship to Miss Styles was. But it looks very much as if you were the one who was elbowed out. I'm pretty sure she was planning to go away. But probably with Johnson, not you. You say that Johnson had a key to Miss Styles' apartment, and you're right about that. This afternoon he used it, walked in, and found—what? Not his fiancee waiting to go away with him to some nearby resort town, as he had expected, but her dead body on the living room floor, where you had left if after shooting her at a range close enough to be consistent with suicide.

"As he came in you surprised him and killed him too. Only you were afraid to get close enough to make his death look like suicide as well—he might have overpowered you."

"That's grotesque," said Winter derisively. "Why don't you look for some evidence instead of making up a story without a single fact to back it up?"

"There *is* one relevant fact," said Farrell placidly, "and that is that Johnson's car key was found in the dashboard of the car outside the apartment building. It was on a key-ring which also held the key to Miss Styles' apartment. If he had left it there, how could he have opened the apartment door? You should have thought of that point when you took the key-ring off Johnson's body and used it to open his car door."

"Why should I want to do that?"

"To steal his suitcase," said Farrell. "The suitcase had to be removed, for if the police found it they would know that your story of a quarrel between Johnson and Miss Styles was a fabrication from first to last. That suitcase of his was evidence that he and Brenda Styles—and not *you* and Brenda—were planning to go away together.

"And if we find Johnson's suitcase at your home, as we probably will," added Farrell pleasantly, "that will make it even worse for you, won't it? Suppose we go now, and take a look?"

As Farrell got up Winter fainted dead away.

*In an Arab Principality on the Persian Gulf Simon Templar is placed in thrilling double jeopardy . . . in a new Saint novelet with a roughishly sparkling cast*

**THE LOVELORN SHEIK**

**By LESLIE CHARTERIS**

in the next SAINT

# the disappearing investors

*by . . . Edgar Wallace*

**A hidden pulse of mystery beats behind every London disappearance. But Mr. Reeder's ear was tuned only to the deadlier wavelengths.**

THERE ARE more than seven million people in Greater London and each one of them is in theory and practice equal under the law and precious to the community. So that, if one is willfully wronged, another must be punished. If one dies of premeditated violence, his slayer must hang by the neck until he be dead.

It is difficult for the sharpest law-eyes to keep tags on so many million people, especially so when a million of them never keep still and are unattached to any particular domicile. It is equally difficult to place an odd twenty thousand who have domiciles but no human association. These include tramps, aged maiden ladies in affluent circumstances, peripatetic members of the criminal classes, and other friendless individuals.

Sometimes uneasy inquiries come through to headquarters. Mainly they are timid and deferential. Mr. Z. has not seen his

*Several years ago Margaret Lane wrote a fascinating character study of a mystery writer at the height of his fame and fortune. It was called* THE BIOGRAPHY OF A PHENOMENON. *The distinguished author under the lens—and a most sympathetic lens it was—was none other than Edgar Wallace. And now the old master returns to thrill us once again with a Mr. Reeder story of exceptional brilliance, with a Burke and Hare twist at the end of it.*


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neighbor, Mr. Y., for a week. No, he doesn't know Mr. Y. Nobody does. A little old man who had no friends and spent his fine days pottering in a garden overlooked by his more gregarious neighbor. And now Mr. Y. potters no more. His milk has not been taken in; his blinds are drawn. Come a sergeant of police and a constable who break a window and climb through, and Mr. Y. is dead somewhere—dead of starvation or a fit or suicide. Should this be the case, all is plain sailing. But suppose the house is empty and Mr. Y. has disappeared. Here the situation becomes difficult and delicate.

Miss Elver went away to Switzerland. She was a middle-aged spinster who had the appearance of being in comfortable circumstances. She went away, locked up her house, and never came back. Switzerland looked for her; the Italian police searched North Italy from Domodossola to Montecatine. And the search did not yield a thin-faced maiden lady with a slight squint.

And then Mr. Charles Boyson Middlekirk, an eccentric and overpowering old man who quarreled with his neighbors about their noisy children—he too went away. He told nobody where he was going. He lived alone with his three cats and was not on speaking terms with anybody else. He did not return to his grimy house.

He too was well off and reputedly a miser. So was Mrs. Athbell Marting, a dour widow who lived with her drudge of a niece. This lady was in the habit of disappearing without any preliminary announcement of her intention. The niece was allowed to order from the local tradesmen just sufficient food to keep body and soul together. Then, when Mrs. Marting returned—as she invariably did—the bills were settled with a great deal of grumbling on the part of the payer, and that was that.

It was believed that Mrs. Marting went to Boulogne or to Paris or even to Brussels. But one day she went out and never came back. Six months later her niece advertised for her, choosing the cheapest papers with an eye to the day of reckoning.

"Queer sort of thing," said the Public Prosecutor, who had before him the dossiers of four people—three women and a man—who had similarly vanished in three months.

He frowned, pressed a bell, and Mr. Reeder came in. Mr. Reeder took the chair that was indicated, looked owlishly over his glasses, shook his head as though he understood the reason for his summons and denied his understanding in advance.

"What do you make of these disappearances?" asked his chief.

"You cannot make any positive of negative," said Mr. Reed-

er carefully. "London is a large place full of strange, mad people who live such—er—commonplace lives that the wonder is that more of them do not disappear in order to do something different from what they are accustomed to doing."

"Have you seen these particulars?"

Mr. Reeder nodded. "I have copies of them," he said. "Mr. Salter very kindly—"

The Public Prosecutor rubbed his head in perplexity.

"I see nothing in these cases—nothing in common, I mean. Four is a fairly low average for a big city—"

"Twenty-seven in twelve months," interrupted his detective apologetically.

"Twenty-seven — are you sure?" The great official was astounded.

Mr. Reeder nodded again. "They were all people with a little money. All were drawing a fairly large income, which was paid to them in bank-notes on the first of every month. Nineteen of them were, at any rate. I have yet to verify eight—and where their revenues came from. None of them had any personal friends or relatives who were on terms of friendship with them—except Mrs. Marting. Beyond these points of resemblance there was nothing to connect one with the other."

The Prosecutor looked at him sharply, but Mr. Reeder was never sarcastic. Not obviously so, at any rate.

"There is another point which I omitted to mention," he went on. "After their disappearance no further money came for them. It came for Mrs. Marting when she was away on her jaunts, but it ceased when she went away on her final journey."

"But twenty-seven! Are you sure?"

Mr. Reeder reeled off the list, giving name, address, and date of disappearance.

"What do you think has happened to them?" the Prosecutor asked.

Mr. Reeder considered for a moment, staring glumly at the carpet.

"I should imagine that they were murdered," he said, almost cheerfully.

The Prosecutor half rose from his chair. "You are in your gayest mood this morning, Mr. Reeder," he said sardonically. "Why on earth should they be murdered?"

Mr. Reeder did not explain. The interview took place in the late afternoon, and he was anxious to be gone, for he had a tacit appointment to meet a young lady of exceeding charm who at five minutes after five would be waiting on the corner of Westminster Bridge and Thames Embankment for the Lee car.

The sentimental qualities of Mr. Reeder were entirely unknown. There are people who say that his sorrow over those whom fate and ill-fortune brought into his punitive hands was the veriest hypocrisy. There were others who believed that he was genuinely pained to see a fellow-creature sent behind bars through his efforts and evidence.

His housekeeper, who thought he was a woman-hater, told her friends in confidence that he was a complete stranger to the tender emotions which enlighten and glorify humanity. In the ten years which she had sacrificed to his service he had displayed neither emotion nor tenderness except to inquire whether her sciatica was better or to express a wish that she should take a holiday by the sea.

She was a woman beyond middle age, but there is no period of life wherein a woman gives up hoping for the best. Though the most perfect of servants in all respects, she secretly despised him, called him to her intimates a frump, and suspected him of living apart from an ill-treated wife. This lady was a widow—as she had told him when he first engaged her—and she had seen better—far better—days.

Her visible attitude toward Mr. Reeder was one of respect and awe. She excused the odd character of his callers and his low acquaintances. She forgave him his square-toed shoes and even his high, flat-crowned hat.

But there is a limit to all hero-worship, and when she discovered that Mr. Reeder was in the habit of waiting to escort a certain young lady to town every day, and frequently found it convenient to escort her home, the limit was reached.

Mrs. Hambleton told her friends—and they agreed—that there was no fool like an old fool, and that marriages between the old and the young invariably end in the divorce court (December v. May and July). She used to leave copies of a favorite Sunday newspaper on his table, where he could not fail to see the flaring headlines: OLD MAN'S WEDDING ROMANCE. WIFE'S PERFIDY BRINGS GRAY HAIR IN SORROW TO THE LAW COURTS.

Whether Mr. Reeder perused these human documents she did not know. He never referred to the tragedies of ill-assorted unions, and went on meeting Miss Belman every morning at nine o'clock and at five-five in the afternoon whenever his business permitted.

He so rarely discussed his own business or introduced the subject that was exercising his mind that it was remarkable he should make even an oblique reference

to his work. Possibly he would not have done so if Miss Margaret Belman had not introduced —unwillingly—a leader of conversation which traced indirectly to the disappearances.

They had been talking of holidays: Margaret was going to Cromer for a fortnight.

"I shall leave on the second. My monthly dividends—doesn't that sound grand?—are due on the first—"

"Eh?"

Reeder swung about. Dividends in most companies are paid at half-yearly intervals.

"Dividends, Miss Margaret?"

She flushed a little at his surprise and then laughed.

"You didn't realize that I was a woman of property?" she said banteringly. "I receive ten pounds a month. You see, my father left me a little house property when he died. I sold the cottages two years ago for a thousand pounds and found a wonderful invesment."

Mr. Reeder made a rapid calculation. "You are drawing something like twelve and one-half per cent," he said. "That is indeed a wonderful investment. What is the name of the company?"

She hesitated. "I'm afraid I can't tell you that," she said. "You see—well, it's rather secret. It has to do with a South American syndicate that supplies arms to—what do you call them —insurgents! I know it is rather dreadful to make money that way—I mean out of arms and things. But it pays terribly well and I can't afford to miss the opportunity."

Reeder frowned. "But why is it such a terrible secret?" he asked. "Quite a number of respectable people make money out of armament concerns."

Again she showed reluctance to explain her meaning.

"We are pledged—the shareholders, I mean—not to divulge our connection with the company," she said. "That is one of the agreements I had to sign. And the money comes regularly. I have had nearly three hundred pounds of my thousand back in dividends already."

"Humph!" said Mr. Reeder, wise enough not to press his question. There was another day tomorrow.

But the opportunity to which he looked forward on the following morning was denied to him. Somebody played a grim "joke" on him—the kind of joke to which he was accustomed, for there were men who had good reason to hate him, and never a year passed but one or the other sought to repay him for his unkindly attentions.

"Your name is Reeder, ain't it?"

Mr. Reeder, tightly grasping his umbrella with both hands, looked over his spectacles at the

shabby man who stood at the bottom of the steps. He was on the point of leaving his house in the Brockley Road for his office in Whitehall, and since he was a methodical man and worked to a time table, he resented in his mild way this interruption which had already cost him fifteen seconds of valuable time.

"You're the fellow who shopped Ike Walker, ain't you?"

Mr. Reeder had indeed "shopped" many men. He was by profession a shopper, which, translated from the argot, means a man who procures the arrest of an evildoer. Ike Walker he knew very well indeed. He was a clever, a too clever, forger of bills of exchange, and was at that precise moment almost permanently employed as orderly in the convict prison at Dartmoor, and might account himself fortunate if he held this easy job for the rest of his twelve years' sentence.

His interrogator was a little hard-faced man wearing a suit that had evidently been originally intended for somebody of greater girth and more commanding height. His trousers were turned up noticably; his waistcoat was full of folds and tucks which only an amateur tailor would have dared, and only one superior to the criticism of his fellows would have worn. His hard, bright eyes were fixed on Mr. Reeder, but there was no menace in them so far as the detective could determine.

"Yes, I was instrumental in arresting Ike Walker," said Mr. Reeder, almost gently.

The man put his hand in his pocket and brought out a small something enclosed in green oiled silk. Mr. Reeder unfolded the covering and found a soiled and crumpled envelope.

"That's from Ike," explained the man. "He sent it out of stir by a gent who was discharged yesterday."

Mr. Reeder was not shocked by this revelation. He knew a good deal about prison rules and that worse things have happened in the best regulated jails than this item of a smuggled letter. He opened the envelope, keeping his eyes on the man's face, took out the crumpled sheet and read the five or six lines of writing.

> Dear Reeder:
>
> Here is a bit of riddle for you.
>
> What other people have got, you can have. I haven't got it, but it is coming to you. It's redhot when you get it, but you're cold when it goes away.
>
> Your loving friend,
>
> IKE WALKER
>
> (Doing a twelve stretch because you went on the witness stand and told a lot of lies).

Mr. Reeder looked up and

their eyes met. "Your friend is a little mad, one thinks?" he asked politely.

"He ain't a friend of mine. A gent asked me to bring it," said the messenger.

"On the contrary," said Mr. Reeder pleasantly, "he gave it to you in Dartmoor Prison yesterday. Your name is Mills. You have eight convictions for burglary, and will have your ninth before the year is out. You were released two days ago. I saw you reporting at Scotland Yard."

The man was for the moment alarmed and in two minds to bolt. Mr. Reeder glanced along Brockley Road, and saw a slim figure who was standing at the corner cross to a waiting tramcar. Seeing his opportunity vanish, the man readjusted his time table.

"Come inside, Mr. Mills."

"I don't want to come inside," said Mr. Mills, now thoroughly agitated. "He asked me to give this to you and I've give it. There's nothing else—"

Mr. Reeder crooked his finger. "Come, birdie!" he said, with great amiability. "And please don't annoy me! I am quite capable of sending you back to your friend Mr. Walker. I am really a most unpleasant man if I am upset."

The messenger followed meekly, wiped his boots with great vigor on the mat and tiptoed up the carpeted stairs to the big study where Mr. Reeder did most of his thinking.

"Sit down, Mills."

With his own hands Mr. Reeder placed a chair for his uncomfortable visitor, and then, pulling another up to his big writing table, he spread the letter before him. He adjusted his glasses, and read, his lips moving. Finally he leaned back in his chair.

"I give it up," he said. "Read me this riddle."

"I don't know what's in the letter—" began the man.

"Read me this riddle."

As he handed the letter across the table, the man betrayed himself. He rose and pushed back his chair with a startled, horrified expression that told Mr. Reeder quite a lot. He laid the letter down on his desk, took a large tumbler from the sideboard, inverted it and covered the scrawled paper.

"Wait," he said, "and don't move till I come back."

And there was an unaccustomed venom in his tone that made the visitor shudder.

Reeder passed out of the room to the bathroom, pulled up his sleeves with a quick jerk of his arm and, turning the faucet, let hot water run over his hands before he reached for a small bottle on a shelf. He uncorked the bottle, poured a liberal portion into the water and let his hands soak. This done, for three

minutes he scrubbed his fingers with a nail-brush, dried them, and, removing his coat and waistcoat carefully, hung them over the edge of the bath. He went back to his uncomfortable guest in his shirt-sleeves.

"Our friend Walker is employed in the hospital," he stated rather than asked. "What have you had there—scarlet fever or something worse?"

He glanced down at the letter under the glass.

"Scarlet fever, of course," he said, "and the letter has been systematically infected. Walker is almost clever."

The wood of a fire was laid in the grate. He carried the letter and the blotting-paper to the hearth, lit the kindling and thrust paper and letter into the flames.

"Almost clever," he said musingly. "Of course, he is one of the orderlies in the hospital. It was scarlet fever, I think you said?"

The gaping man nodded.

"Of a virulent type, of course. How very fascinating!"

He thrust his hands in his pockets and looked down benevolently at the wretched emissary of the vengeful Walker.

"You may go now, Mills," he said gently. "I rather think that you are infected. That ridiculous piece of oiled silk is quite inadequate—which means 'quite useless'—as a protection against wandering germs. You will have scarlet fever in three days, and will probably be dead at the end of the week. I will send you a wreath."

He opened the door, pointed to the stairway and the man slunk out.

Mr. Reeder watched him through the window, saw him cross the street and disappear round the corner into the Lewisham High Road, and then, going up to his bedroom, he put on a newer frock-coat and waistcoat, drew on his hands a pair of fabric gloves and went forth to his labors.

He did not expect to meet Mr. Mills again, never dreaming that the gentleman from Dartmoor was planning a "bust" which would bring them again into contact. For Mr. Reeder the incident was closed.

That day news of another disappearance had come through from police headquarters, and Mr. Reeder was waiting at ten minutes before five at the rendezvous for the girl who, he instinctively knew, could give him a thread of the clue. He was determined that this time his inquiries should bear fruit. But it was not until they had reached the end of Brockley Road, and he was walking slowly up toward the girl's boarding-house, that she gave him a hint.

"Why are you so persistent,

Mr. Reeder?" she asked, a little impatiently. "Do you wish to invest money? Because, if you do, I'm sorry I can't help you. That is another agreement we made—that we would not introduce new shareholders."

Mr. Reeder stopped, took off his hat and rubbed the back of his head. His housekeeper, watching him from an upper window, was perfectly certain he was proposing and had been rejected.

"I am going to tell you something, Miss Belman, and I hope —er—that I shall not alarm you. Please listen to me very carefully."

And very briefly he told the story of the disappearances and the queer coincidence which marked every case—the receipt of a dividend on the first of every month. As he proceeded, the color left the girl's face.

"You are serious, of course?" she said, serious enough herself. "You wouldn't tell me that unless—the company is the Mexico City Investment Syndicate. They have offices in Portugal Street."

"How did you come to hear of them?" asked Mr. Reeder.

"I had a letter from their manager, Mr. De Silvo. He told me that a friend had mentioned my name, and gave full particulars of the investment."

"Have you that letter?"

She shook her head. "No. I was particularly asked to bring it with me when I went to see them. Although, in point of fact, I never did see them." She smiled. "I wrote to their lawyers —will you wait? I have their letter."

Mr. Reeder waited at the gate while the girl went into the house and returned presently with a small portfolio, from which she took a quarto sheet. It was headed with the name of a legal firm; Bracher & Bracher, and was the usual formal type of letter one expects from a lawyer.

Dear Madam:

Re Mexico City Investment Syndicate: We act as lawyers to this syndicate, and so far as we know it is a reputable concern. We feel that it is only due to us that we should say that we do not advise investments in any concern which offers such large profits, for usually there is a corresponding risk. We know, however, that this syndicate has paid 12½ percent, and sometimes as much as 20 percent, and we have had no complaints about them. We cannot, of course, as lawyers, guarantee the financial soundness of any of our clients, and can only repeat that, in so far as we have been able to ascertain, the syndicate conducts a genuine business and enjoys a

very sound financial backing.

Yours faithfully,
BRACHER & BRACHER

"You say you never saw De Silvo?"

She shook her head. "No. I saw Mr. Bracher, but when I went to the office of the syndicate, which is in the same building, I found only a clerk in attendance. Mr. De Silvo had been called out of town. I had to leave the letter because the lower portion was an application for shares in the syndicate. The capital could be withdrawn at three days' notice, and I must say that this last clause decided me. When I had a letter from Mr. De Silvo accepting my investment, I sent him the money."

Mr. Reeder nodded.

"And you've received your dividends regularly ever since?" he asked.

"Every month," said the girl triumphantly. "And really I think you're wrong in connecting the company with these disappearances."

Mr. Reeder did not reply. That afternoon he made it his business to call at 179 Portugal Street. It was a two-story building of an old fashioned type. A wide-flagged hall led into the building and a set of old-fashioned stairs ran up to the top floor, which was occupied by a China merchant; and from the hall led three doors. That on the left bore the legend *"Bracher & Bracher, Solicitors,"* and immediately facing it was the office of the Mexican syndicate. At the far end of the passage was a door which exhibited the name *"John Baston,"* but as to Mr. Baston's business there was no indication.

Mr. Reeder knocked gently at the door of the syndicate and a voice bade him come in. A young man, wearing glasses, was sitting at a typewriting table, a pair of dictaphone receivers in his ears, and he was typing rapidly.

"No, sir, Mr. De Silvo is not in," said the clerk. "He only comes in about twice a week. Will you give me your name?"

"It is not important," said Reeder gently, and went out, closing the door behind him.

He was more fortunate in his call upon Bracher & Bracher, for Mr. Joseph Bracher was in his office: a tall, florid gentleman who wore a large rose in his buttonhole. The firm of Bracher & Bracher was evidently a prosperous one, for there were a half dozen clerks in the outer office, and Mr. Bracher's private sanctum, with its big partner desk, was a model of shabby comfort.

"Sit down, Mr. Reeder," said the lawyer, glancing at the card.

In a few words Mr. Reeder stated his business, and Mr. Bracher smiled.

"It is fortunate you came today," he said. "If it were tomorrow we should not be able to give you any information. The truth is, we have had to ask Mr. De Silvo to find other lawyers. No, no, there is nothing wrong, except that they constantly refer their clients to us, and we feel that we are becoming in the nature of sponsors for their clients. That, of course, is very undesirable."

"Have you a record of the people who have written to you from time to time asking your advice?"

Mr. Bracher shook his head. "It is a curious thing to confess, but we haven't," he said. "And that is one of the reasons why we have decided to give up this client. Three weeks ago the letter-book in which we kept copies of all letters sent to people who applied for a reference most unaccountably disappeared. It was put in the safe overnight, and in the morning, although there was no sign of tampering with the lock, it had vanished. The circumstances were so mysterious, and my brother and I were so deeply concerned, that we applied to the syndicate to give us a list of their clients, and that request was never complied with."

Mr. Reeder sought inspiration in the ceiling.

"Who is John Baston?" he asked.

The lawyer laughed. "There again I am ignorant. I believe he is a very wealthy financier, but, as far as I know, he only comes to his office for three months in the year, and I have never seen him."

Mr. Reeder offered the lawyer his flabby hand and walked back along Portugal Street, his chin on his breast, his hands behind him dragging his umbrella, so that he bore a ludicrous resemblance to some strange tailed animal.

That night he waited again for the girl, but she did not appear, and although he remained at the rendezvous until half-past five he did not see her. This was not very unusual, for sometimes she had to work late, and he went home without any feeling of apprehension.

He finished his own frugal dinner and then walked across to the boarding-house. Miss Belman had not arrived, the landlady told him, and he returned to his study and telephoned first to the office where she was employed and then to the private address of her employer.

"She left at half-past four," was the surprising news. "Somebody telephoned to her and she asked me if she might go early."

"Oh!" said Mr. Reeder blankly.

He did not go to bed that night, but sat up in a small room at Scotland Yard, reading the

brief reports which came in from the various divisions. And with the morning came the sickening realization that Margaret Belman's name must be added to those who had disappeared in such extraordinary circumstances.

He dozed in the big Windsor chair. At eight o'clock he returned to his own house and shaved and bathed, and when the Public Prosecutor arrived at his office he found Mr. Reeder waiting for him in the corridor. It was a changed Mr. Reeder, and the change was not due entirely to lack of sleep. His voice was sharper; he had lost some of that atmosphere of apology which usually enveloped him.

In a few words he told of Margaret Belman's disappearance.

"Do you connect De Silvo with this?" asked his chief.

"Yes, I think I do," said Mr. Reeder quietly, and then he added: "There is only one hope, and it is a very slender one—a very slender one indeed!"

He did not tell the Public Prosecutor in what that hope consisted, but walked down to the offices of the Mexico City Investment Syndicate.

Mr. De Silvo was not in. He would have been very much surprised if he had been. He crossed the hallway to see the lawyer, and this time he found Mr. Ernest Bracher present with his brother.

When Reeder spoke to the point, it was very much to the point.

"I am leaving a police officer in Portugal Street to arrest De Silvo the moment he puts in an appearance. I feel that you, as his lawyers, should know this," he said.

"But why on earth—" began Mr. Joseph Bracher, in a tone of astonishment.

"I don't know what charge I shall bring against him, but it will certainly be a very serious one," said Reeder. "For the moment I have not confided to Scotland Yard the basis for my suspicions, but your client has got to tell a very plausible story and produce indisputable proof of his innocence to have any hope of escape."

"I am quite in the dark," said the lawyer, mystified. "What has he been doing? Is his syndicate a fraud?"

"I know nothing more fraudulent," said Mr. Reeder shortly. "Tomorrow I intend to obtain the necessary authority to search his papers and to search the room and papers of Mr. John Baston. I have an idea that I shall find something in that room of considerable interest to me."

It was eight o'clock that night before he left Scotland Yard, and he was turning toward the familiar corner, when he saw a car come from Westminister Bridge toward Scotland Yard.

Somebody leaned out of the window and signaled him, and the car turned. It was a two-seater coupe and the driver was Mr. Joseph Bracher.

"We've found De Silvo," he said breathlessly as he brought the car to a standstill at the curb and jumped out.

He was very agitated and his face was pale. Mr. Reeder could have sworn that his teeth were chattering.

"There's something wrong—very badly wrong," he went on. "My brother has been trying to get the truth from him. My God! if he has done these terrible things I shall never forgive myself."

"Where is he?" asked Mr. Reeder.

"He came just before dinner to our house at Dulwich. My brother and I are bachelors and we live there alone now, and he has been to dinner before. My brother questioned him and he made certain admissions which are almost incredible. The man must be mad."

"What did he say?"

"I can't tell you. Ernest is detaining him until you come."

Mr. Reeder stepped into the car and in a few minutes they were flying across Westminister Bridge toward Camberwell. Lane House, an old-fashioned Georgian residence, lay at the end of a countrified road which was, he found, a cul de sac. The house stood in grounds of considerable size, he noted as they passed up the drive and stopped before the porch. Mr. Bracher alighted and opened the door, and Reeder passed into a costly furnished hall. One door was ajar.

"Is that Mr. Reeder?" He recognized the voice of Ernest Bracher, and walked into the room.

The younger Mr. Bracher was standing with his back to the empty fireplace; there was nobody else in the room.

"De Silvo's gone upstairs to lie down," explained the lawyer. "This is dreadful business, Mr. Reeder."

He held out his hand and Reeder crossed the room to take it. As he put his foot on the square Persian rug before the fireplace, he realized his danger and tried to spring back. But his balance was lost. He felt himself falling through the cavity which the carpet hid, lashed out and caught for a moment the edge of the trap. But as the lawyer came round and raised his foot to stamp upon the clutching fingers, Reeder released his hold and dropped.

The shock of the fall took away his breath, and for a second he sprawled, half lying, half sitting, on the floor of the cellar into which he had fallen. Looking up, he saw the older of the two leaning over. The square aperture was diminishing in size.

There was evidently a sliding panel which covered the hole in normal times.

"We'll deal with you later, Reeder," said Joseph Bracher with a smile. "We've had quite a lot of clever people here—"

Something cracked in the cellar. The bullet seared the lawyer's cheek, and smashed a glass chandelier to fragments. Bracher stepped back with a yell of fear. In another second the trap was closed and Reeder was alone in a small brick-lined cellar. Not entirely alone, for the automatic pistol he held in his hand was a very pleasant companion in that moment of crisis.

From his hip pocket he took a flat electric torch, switched on the current and surveyed his prison. The walls and floor were damp; that was the first thing he noticed. In one corner was a small flight of brick steps leading to a locked steel door, and then—a voice spoke close to his ear.

"Mr. Reeder."

He spun round and turned his lamp upon the speaker. It was Margaret Belman, who had risen from a heap of sacks where she had been sleeping.

"I'm afraid I've got you into very bad trouble," she said, and he marveled at her calm.

"How long have you been here?"

"Since last night," she answered. "Mr. Bracher telephoned me to see him and he picked me up in his car. They kept me in the other room until tonight, but an hour ago they brought me here."

"Which is the other room?"

She pointed to the steel door. She offered no further details of her capture, and it was not a moment to discuss their misfortune. Reeder went up the steps and tried the door. It was fastened from the other side, and opened inward, he discovered. There was no sign of a keyhole. He asked her where the door led and she told him that it was to an underground kitchen and coal-cellar. She had hoped to escape, because only a barred window stood between her and freedom in the "little room" where she was kept.

"But the window was very thick," she said, "and of course I could do nothing with the bars."

Reeder made another inspection of the cellar, then sent the light of his lamp up at the ceiling. He saw nothing there except a steel pulley fastened to a beam that crossed the entire width of the cellar.

"Now what on earth is he going to do?" he asked thoughtfully, and as though his enemies had heard the question and were determined to leave him in no doubt as to their plans, there came the sound of gurgling

water, and in a second he was ankle-deep.

He put the light on to the place whence the water was coming. There were three circular holes in the wall, from each of which was gushing a solid stream.

"What is it?" she asked in a terrified whisper.

"Get on to the steps and stay there," he ordered peremptorily, and made investigation to see if it was possible to staunch the flow. He saw at a glance that this was impossible. And now the mystery of the disappearances was a mystery no longer.

The water came up with incredible rapidity, first to his knee, then to his thighs, and he joined her on the steps.

There was no possible escape for them. He guessed the water would come up only so far as to make it impossible for them to reach the beam across the roof or the pulley, the dreadful purpose of which he could guess. The dead must be got out of this charnel house in some way or other. Strong swimmer as he was, he knew that in the hours ahead it would be impossible to keep afloat.

He slipped off his coat and vest and unbuttoned his collar.

"You had better take off your skirt," he said in a matter-of-fact tone. "Can you swim?"

"Yes," she answered in a low voice.

He did not ask her the real question which was in his mind. For how long could she swim?

There was a long silence. The water crept higher, and then—

"Are you very much afraid?" he asked, and took her hand in his.

"No, I don't think I am," she said. "It is wonderful having you with me. Why are they doing this?"

He said nothing, but carried the soft hand to his lips and kissed it.

The water was now reaching the top step. Reeder stood with his back to the iron door, waiting. And then he felt something touch the door from the other side. There was a faint click, as though a bolt had been slipped back. He put her gently aside and held his palms to the door. There was no doubt now. Somebody was fumbling on the other side. He went down a step and presently he felt the door yield and come toward him, and there was a momentary gleam of light. In another second he had wrenched the door open and sprung through.

"Hands up!"

Whoever it was had dropped his lamp, and now Mr. Reeder focused the light of his own torch and nearly dropped.

For the man in the passage was Mills, the ex-convict who had brought the tainted letter from Dartmoor!

"All right, guv'nor, it's a cop," growled the man.

And then the whole explanation flashed upon the detective. In an instant he had gripped the girl by the hand and dragged her through the narrow passage into which the water was now steadily overrunning.

"Which way did you get in, Mills?" he demanded authoritatively.

"Through the window."

"Show me—quick!"

The convict led the way to what was evidently the window through which the girl had looked with such longing. The bars had been removed; the window sash itself lifted from its rusty hinges; and in another second the three were standing on the grass, with the stars twinkling above them.

"Mills," said Mr. Reeder, and his voice shook, "you came here to burglarize this house."

"That's right," growled Mills. "I tell you it's a cop. I'm not going to give you any trouble."

"Skip!" hissed Mr. Reeder. "And skip quick! Now, young lady, we'll go for a little walk."

A few seconds later a patrolling constable was smitten dumb by the apparition of a middle-aged man in shirt and trousers, and a lady who was inadequately attired in a silk petticoat.

"The Mexican company was Bracher & Bracher," explained Reeder to his chief. "There was no John Baston. His room was a passage-way by which the Brachers could get from one room to the other. The clerk in the Mexican syndicate's office was, of course, blind. I spotted that the moment I saw him. There are any number of blind typists employed in the City of London. A blind clerk was necessary if the identity of De Silvo with the Brachers was to be kept a secret.

"Bracher & Bracher had been going badly for years. It will probably be found that they have made away with clients' money; and they hit upon this scheme of inducing foolish investors to put money into their syndicate on the promise of large dividends.

"Their victims were well chosen, and Joseph—who was the brains of the organization—conducted the most rigorous investigation to make sure that these unfortunate people had no intimate friends. If they had any suspicion about an applicant, Brachers would write a letter deprecating the idea of an investment and suggesting that the too-shrewd dupe should find another and a safer method than the Mexican syndicate afforded.

"After they had paid one or two years' dividends the wretched investor was lured to the house at Dulwich and there sci-

entifically killed. You will probably find an unofficial cemetery in their grounds. So far as I can make out, they have stolen more than a hundred and twenty thousand pounds in the past two years by this method."

"It is incredible," said the Prosecutor. "Incredible!"

Mr. Reeder shrugged and tightened his lips.

"Is there anything more incredible than the Burke and Hare murders? There are Burkes and Hares in every branch of society and in every period of history."

"Why did they delay their execution of Miss Belman?"

Mr. Reeder coughed.

"They wanted to make a clean sweep, but did not wish to kill her until they had me in their hands. I rather suspect"—he coughed again — "that they thought I had an especial interest in the young lady."

"And have you?" asked the Public Prosecutor.

Mr. Reeder did not reply.

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# what's new in crime

*by . . . Hans Stefan Santesson*

**New England town portraits of violence and sudden death vie with a dreadful homecoming for this month's mystery accolades.**

GEORGE H. SUKELY had been "a living doll." Everybody said so. But when Inspector Schmidt of New York Homicide first saw him, he was a rather well-dressed corpse with a badly torn ear, his face a mass of bruises, his body bound to the bed while someone had worked on him with somewhat less than loving intentions. George H. Sukely, it appeared, had been a friendly man—some suggested a little too friendly—and the problem was to discover who, among his friends, had first brutally tortured him and then — gently — killed him. George Bagby reports on Inspector Schmidt's solution of the case in his DEAD STORAGE (Doubleday, $2.75)—a solution which may disturb you if you prefer a conventional murderer. And there are such people, after all.

Ludovic Travers has long been one of this column's favorites, in a quiet sort of way. Christopher Bush's THE CASE OF THE BENEVOLENT BOOKIE (Macmillan, $2.75), describes what hap-

*All too frequently mystery novels are labeled "super-thrillers" by critics who look inward at realms from which the public is barred. With such subjective judgments Mr. Santesson has little patience. He prefers instead to appraise each new book with a fireside mellowness, and a strictly objective honesty. But we think you'll agree he is not sparing of praise when he really likes a book.*

pened when Lord Tynworth ran into a soft-hearted gambler and Lady Tynworth was unexpectedly confronted with her past. Chief Superintendent George Wharton of the Yard enters the picture when Travers is attacked, and is still with Travers when the murderer is caught, and the worried Mrs. Bolfray smiles again. Don't read this if you subscribe to the love 'em and slug 'em school. It's recommended if you don't.

The Hammersmith Institute of Apitherapy was run by a doctor with a curious penchant for feeding people honey and curing them of their ills by bee stings. District Attorney Devitt enters the picture, in Perry Westbrook's THE STING OF DEATH (Arcadia, $2.50), when one of the patients dies under rather peculiar circumstances and it is discovered that the patients were being fed "cure alls" far more deadly than honey . . .

GIDEON'S DAY by J. J. Marrick (Harper) came close, as far as this writer is concerned, to being the best novel in this field published in 1955. As was the case with Ellery Queen's beautiful piece of Americana, THE GLASS VILLAGE (Little Brown), here was a novel that reflected something of the tempo of our times and which—unlike the best sellers which will be forgotten the day after tomorrow—will be studied and read years from now, by men and women who will want to know what made us strange people tick.

Ellery Queen is one of the most widely known names in this field. Perhaps another gentleman's work sells somewhat better in the reprint field—primarily because he appeals, his protests to the contrary, to the frustrations and the latent sadism of not too literate readers. But Ellery Queen speaks to an audience that does not need this steady diet of rugged wish-imagery.

One of his (their) early novels, CALAMITY TOWN, has just been reissued along with THE MURDERER IS A FOX and TEN DAYS' WONDER, as "WRIGHTSVILLE MURDERS" (Little Brown, $3.95). These portraits of the New England town of Wrightsville where violence and sudden death strike more than once should be read by those of you who may have forgotten that this field has for many years made lasting contributions to American Letters.

British Intelligence agent Hambledon looked at his opposite in the Austrian Special Police, "at the tousled mud-encrusted hair, the earth-stained face, hands and arms, the disreputable and quite inadequate sack, the enormous legs coated with dry

mud when they were not streaked with blood from minor scratches, the ineffably domestic carpet slippers, and began to laugh."

He was nearing the end of a case that had involved escaped lunatics, a village idiot who was by no means the village idiot, and a group of singularly unpleasant gentlemen who had all helped to complicate Hambledon's life in Manning Coles' new novel, THE BASLE EXPRESS (Doubleday, $2.75). Recommended.

A Reno private eye slugs and loves his way to a not unexpected solution in Dean Evans' NO SLIGHTEST WHISPER (Abelard-Schuman, $2.75). It is a little difficult to do full, rounded justice to this excursion into sub-Spillanism. Suffice it to say that it is a facile introduction to violence, to unpleasant people, to a warm brunette, and to assorted corpses, which may or may not excite you. I am afraid I was not particularly thrilled.

When young Tom Williams stumbled over a corpse in the dark—a corpse which promptly disappeared — he was understandably confused. When both plant management and a killer further contribute to the confusion, Tom—who has run into a very pretty girl who has decided she wants to marry him—finds himself in the middle of considerable excitement. Cathleen Schurr's DARK ENCOUNTER (Rinehart, $2.75), deals ably with this excitement and the people, repressed and otherwise, who contribute to it.

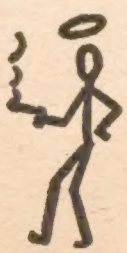
Helen Nielsen, in STRANGER IN THE DARK (Ives Washburn, $2.75), reports on what happens when Larry Willis, special representative of the Prairie State Farm Tool and Equipment Company, runs into problems which have very little to do with farm equipment. Within hours after his arrival in Copenhagen to attend a business convention he becomes the unwilling center of a conspiracy which includes a frightened millionaire and a ballerina with non-artistic interests. Larry finds the Danish police to be quite efficient and Denmark far from relaxing.

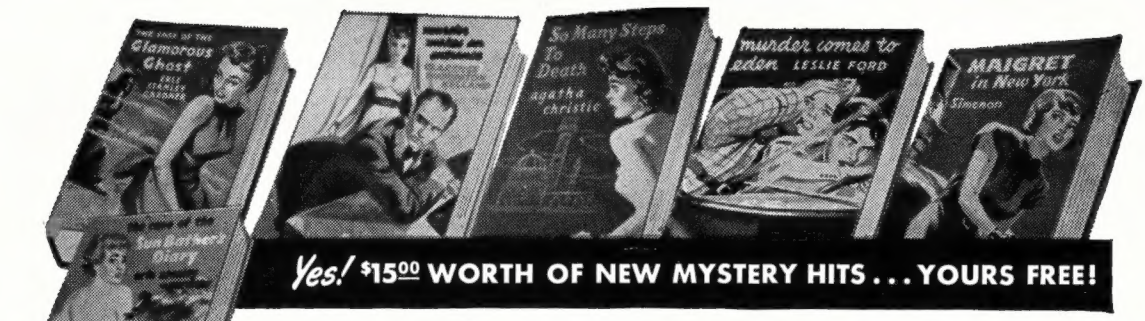
THE SECOND CURTAIN, by Roy Fuller (Macmillan, $2.75), is published as a mystery. It is a little difficult to understand why. It is a realistic and superb portrait of a shabby, bearded, mildly eccentric author and admitted aesthete who finds himself, for a while, in an alien and dangerous world. "The Second Curtain" describes George Garner's brief excursion into that world—and its amazing outcome. Literate and interesting and recommended reading.

Murder comes to St. Catherine Street in E. Louise Cushing's BLOOD ON MY RUG (Arcadia, $2.50). Miss Talmadge (obviously no relation to another family of the same name) knew that the Khalabar rug really wasn't too suitable for an office. But it was *her* office and she liked it —until a certain tragic morning when she discovered the body of the late George Albert Smithins of Red River, Alberta, his blood dark and ugly against the rose carpet.

The late Mr. Smithins had not always been known as George Albert Smithins. Once Detective Inspector Richard MacKay had discovered that much about him, he was closer to the answer. The tall and alert Montreal police Inspector, with "laughing lines at the corners of his eyes, and a quirk at one side of his mouth," is a pleasant and younger addition to the ranks which include Inspector Schmidt and the only recently mellowing Captain Heimrich.

What *had* changed Rafe Jonason? A devoted husband and father—before the accident—the man who was brought home from the hospital had become a dangerous stranger, and a threat to the wife he didn't even recognize. Who *was* this man who insisted he'd be "no stand-in for some queer guy who has mysteriously vanished"? Frances Shelley Wees, in THE KEYS OF MY PRISON (Doubleday, $2.75), describes what happens when a desperately trapped individual realizes "he has no life before him, no freedom, no hope of freedom, if he is guilty," and the role played by quiet Dr. Jonathan Merrill, psychologist and consultant to the Toronto police. The author of "M'Lord, I Am Not Guilty," has again made an interesting contribution to the field.



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